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**REPRESENTATIONS OF
SCREEN HETEROSEXUALITY
IN THE MUSICALS OF
FRED ASTAIRE
AND
VINCENTE MINNELLI**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which heterosexuality is rendered in the Hollywood genre where its existence is most privileged: musicals of the studio era (c.1930 - c.1960). In this popular film category, heterosexuality is expressed in a framework of "boy-meets-girl" amatory coupling that is remarkably amplified and insistent. In analysis that is at once sympathetic and critical of the subject matter, I show that heterosexuality in the Hollywood musical is constructed in a way that is far from monolithic. On the contrary, I find that there are in fact varieties of heterosexual identity that exist in the genre, and that they are most succinctly revealed through romantic engagement. Yet heterosexuality is depicted along divergent formulations owing to contrasting relational aims and assumptions. Building on Richard Dyer's 1993 essay, "'I Seem to Find the Happiness I Seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical," I will discuss how the basis of these separate models is traceable to different approaches related to power distributions between men and women. These processes, in turn, arise from different notions concerning masculinity and femininity. In this way, a mix of gender expressions inhabit the Hollywood musical leading to an assortment of heterosexual models.

Textually these models become visible not only through an analysis of characterization and the position of the man and woman within the narrative, but in the camera work, all aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, and most cogently, in the arrangement of the central heterosexual couple in the song-and-dance sequences.

For my examination of heterosexuality in the Hollywood musical, I will concentrate on the work of two of its greatest auteurs: Fred Astaire (star) and Vincente Minnelli (director). The impact each man made on this genre is hard to overestimate. In terms of methodology I divide my analysis between these two artists, and ascertain what model(s) of heterosexual identity are communicated by them. Then after establishing what design(s) of heterosexual life each one suggests (for Astaire I analyse *Top Hat* [1935] as well as *Carefree* [1938] and *The Sky's the Limit* [1943], while for Minnelli I look at *Meet Me in St. Louis* [1944] and *The Pirate* [1948]), I conclude this thesis by examining their most acclaimed joint effort (*The Band Wagon* [1953]) to discern what, if any, change one might have had on the other. A phenomenon tied to the US musical (whether stage or screen) is that although it is the most heterosexual of genres, it is also one traditionally both crafted and appreciated by gay men.

Though it does not fall within the scope of this thesis, it is worth speculating for future work if Astaire's heterosexuality and Minnelli's homosexuality had any significant bearing on the way they represented the standard boy meets-girl plot device upon which the Hollywood musical relies.

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Section 1

ASTAIRE

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First and foremost I want to thank Professor Richard Dyer for his guiding hand, support, and trust in my abilities. His pioneering writings on minority and majority representation were the reason why I came to study at the University of Warwick, and it has been a tremendous honour to have been his student. In addition, I must thank Professor Genette Vincendeau, José Arroyo, and V.F. Perkins for their time in reading my work in the annual research reviews that were conducted during the period in which this thesis was written. In addition, I am indebted to the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of Universities in the UK for awarding me the Overseas Research Students Award Scheme.

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Very special debts of gratitude go to Dr. Andrew Klevan of the University of Kent at Canterbury and to Ph.D. candidate James Steffen of Emory University. Each had a profound impact on this thesis. Dr. Klevan challenged me to rethink my original ideas concerning Astaire's persona, while Mr. Steffen's help was broader yet just as critical.

Finally I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Dennis and Carolyn Crouse. Their support was so crucial that without their love and patience this effort would have been frankly impossible.

A NOTE CONCERNING SPELLING

Due to the degree in which UK English is changing with what seems a movement toward the US style, all spelling in this thesis conforms to that recommended in the 1996 edition of the Oxford Colour Spelling Dictionary ed. Maurice White (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Chapter 1

Introduction: Loaded Silences

Now it is well known, even in our age of strident salvationists, that all norms tend towards silence. For every book that today defends the supremacy of heterosexuality, there are a thousand that assume it. The history of sexual virtue is no monotone, but neither is it incoherent. It is the narrative of a loaded silence.

Jon Ward, "The Nature of Heterosexuality"

Richard Dyer began a 1988 piece in Screen with the words, "This is an article about a subject that, much of the time as I've been writing it, seems not to be there as a subject at all."¹ He was discussing the idea of filmic representations of whiteness as an ethnicity, and after spending much of the Seventies and Eighties investigating (among other topics) the way women and minorities are depicted on film he turned his attention to images of men and majorities. His earlier work -- for instance, his groundbreaking writing on gays and lesbians -- added to a very rapidly expanding body of critical knowledge on both sides of the Atlantic directed toward a region of film analysis that had been largely neglected. The insights by him and others were extremely valuable, yet they had one unintended effect: examining the manner in which women and (sexual and racial) minorities are constructed not only served to

leave men and (racial and sexual) majorities as the yardstick or norm, but strengthened their position as such. Thus in the last decade there has been something of a shift to the investigation of areas like the cinematic representation of masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexuality.

This thesis is centred around the last of the examples listed-- heterosexuality. Making a crucial point, Jon Ward declares that "all social norms tend toward silence."² This view is confirmed by Dyer in his study of whiteness. He discovered that majority constructions are difficult to examine because they are elusive in the way they seldom call attention to themselves and are often instead about "something else." This makes it very hard to "see" their structure, content, and power-- let alone allow anyone to understand and analyse them. Dyer found that such strategies of deflection sustain the "natural" power of men and majorities, for it enables them to exert their hold even as the traces of their existence shift to more limited expressions further removed from the original source. In examining whiteness as a construction in film, Dyer gives examples concerning this process of deflection:

Any instance of white representation is always immediately something more specific-- *Brief Encounter* [David Lean, 1946] is not about white people, it is about English middle-class people; *The Godfather* [Francis Ford Coppola, 1972] is not about white people, it is about Italian-American people; but *The Color Purple* [Steven Spielberg, 1985] is about black people, before it is about poor, southern US people.³

Of course the situation is that such films as *Brief Encounter* and *The Godfather*, although they are not reducible to this, are not only about different varieties of the white experience but are in many ways insistently so. Even to talk of "the white experience" sounds strange in a way that speaking of "the black experience" (or, say, the Jewish or Japanese) would not. Except in the case of racist rhetoric, any expression of "the white experience" is conveyed in more specific terms (in the US, for example, this is always put across through the use of hyphens as in Irish-American or Polish-American). In this respect, the attempt to analyse the constructions of heterosexuality in film parallels the effort to examine depictions of whiteness. The difficulty of such a project is likewise reflected in popular language before one even delves into film. This is seen in an expression such as "the homosexual lifestyle" because even in an age in which attitudes

toward gays and lesbians are quickly evolving, it is hard to imagine that a similar phrase concerning heterosexuality will become common any time soon. (The closest seems to be the derisive term "breeders," but it is a problematic expression because there are -- and will always be -- gays, lesbians, and bisexuals who choose to produce children.) I treat as fact that it is an elemental part of human existence to view the world in terms of one's self, that is, to regard life through the filter of one's experience and that this experience is primarily social. In this view, one's identity is shaped in large measure from one's place or sense of belonging in groups like family, religious community, school, club, military, and job circle, and that consequently such groups tend to become extensions of self. Frederick Turner regards ethnocentrism as a culturally universal feature-- whether it be the Chinese who view their country as the centre of the earth, or the Hopis of Arizona insofar as they refer to themselves as "the Human Beings," or the dominating West --but that we must learn to cultivate generosity and empathy to overcome this "default option." Such practices as "the European traditions of classical study, objective scientific experiment, the Grand Tour, and the like, were deliberate efforts to override this default option."⁴ Following in this spirit, the aim of this

thesis is not so much to take heterosexuality to task as it is to denaturalize it. In other words, I approach my study of screen heterosexuality with an affectionate yet critical eye: mindful of the often rich, beautiful, and satisfying function and role heterosexuality plays in human life, while trying to locate its material basis in film in order to divest it of the hegemonic status it enjoys.

All norms tend toward silence as Ward says, but it is a "loaded" silence since norms are meant to be expressions of "nature." The natural order, in turn, is interpreted to be an expression of the Divine, and as a result this "silence" is necessarily "loaded"--it embodies all there is. Yet a contradiction arises because the Natural is identified with the Good, and so could be said not to contain "everything." Even so, by their association with the Divine and the dynamics of nature the social norms devised by men and majorities are made to appear part of the eternal verities.⁵ To demystify this process and examine some of the material ways in which heterosexuality is constructed on film, it was necessary to find a genre where romance between men and women is altogether vital. Limiting my search to Hollywood cinema of the studio era (c. 1930 - c. 1960), this instantly excluded a number of popular genres,

including: westerns, science fiction and horror, war (and anti-war), and the gangster film. Meanwhile two genres in which heterosexual romance is more likely to play a bigger part-- film noir and screwball comedy -- did not seem like fair expressions. After all, though it would be fun, say, to step into a *Big Sleep* (1946) or *His Girl Friday* (1940, each by Howard Hawks) world, the first might prove too fatal while the second might prove too exhausting. Besides both categories are hardly dependent on what has been traditionally described as the principal reason for love and sex between men and women: the raising of a family. This left the musical and the melodrama. I chose the musical for several reasons. The leading one was that musicals not only rely on the familiar premise of "boy-meets-girl," but that this stock feature is magnified by the celebration of this process through singing, dancing, or both. Musicals, then, push the paradoxical situation of the loaded silence of heterosexuality to a far greater degree than other genres. In addition, musicals are supportive of this process of boy-meets-girl and the dynamics of the family in a way that contrasts with the experience of pain, tension, and hysteria at the centre of the family melodrama, woman's picture, and film noir.

I was interested, however, to find out whether the support directed toward heterosexual life was genuinely

earned, that is, whether musicals succeed on the level of communicating attractive wish-dreams for both members of the central heterosexual couple. The patterns of physical interaction between the man and woman in the musical --particularly as revealed in the numbers-- seemed to offer a concrete textual means of ascertaining this.

Therefore an indispensable essay in this thesis was Dyer's 1993 exploration of heterosexuality in the musical in a work titled, "'I Seem to Find the Happiness I Seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical." In it, he argued that the manner in which the man and the woman physically move in a number suggests different relational models. For instance, if the man appeared to control the actions of the woman and she submitted to his dominion to an extent that erased her expressivity, he labelled such an unequal arrangement the "Barbara Cartland" model. But for dances that seemed to illustrate the notion of complementarity within equality (as reflected in movements where each person is allowed to show difference yet do so commensurately), he called them the "Jane Austen" model. Finally, for those rare occasions in which sameness seems to be conveyed (as suggested in dancing filled with mirroring and side by side motions), he named them the "New Woman" model.

Needless to say, analysing the design of heterosexuality suggested between the central heterosexual couple involves examining other features as well (attire, singing styles, range of volition, relationship to the world, position within the narrative-- to name a few), but Dyer takes a vital aspect of the musical in a way that permits one a tangible means of getting to the heart of an otherwise slippery topic.⁶

I conduct my analysis of heterosexual love and identity in the US musical of the studio era through the films of two individuals I treat as auteurs. The first artist is dancer-singer Fred Astaire (1899-1987), and the other is designer-director Vincente Minnelli (1910-86). David Thomson maintains that Astaire represents "the most refined human expression of the musical"-- and possibly, too, of cinema.⁷ During his long career in musicals, Astaire exerted remarkable control in a manner that seems to eclipse many of the directors that he worked "under," the biggest example being those movies credited to Mark Sandrich (six in all). I do not mean to imply that Astaire is the author of his musicals in a manner that denies the valuable input of others and arrogantly does not admit of the inherently collaborative nature of filmmaking. I make the claim of Astaire as an auteur because of his signature dance style, the camera style

that was developed to film his particular choreography, and the amazing choice of musical material written expressly for him. As a director himself, Minnelli has long been regarded as an auteur and is the most honoured musical filmmaker in Hollywood history. None of Minnelli's closest rivals for that distinction-- Rouben Mamoulian, Busby Berkeley, Charles Walters, Stanley Donen, Bob Fosse --ever directed a musical that captured the Academy Award for "Best Picture" (he did so twice) or won an Oscar for directing (the one exception being Fosse). (*An American in Paris* [1951] and *Gigi* [1958] are the Minnelli musicals that received the Best Picture Academy Award. Minnelli won an Oscar for Best Director for the latter, while Fosse got his trophy for *Cabaret* [1972]).

What drew me to select Astaire and Minnelli ultimately had to do with juxtaposing their extremely opposite personas: the light, carefree Astaire versus the dark, melodramatic Minnelli. A claim, for example, has been made that Astaire offers an alternative to conventional heterosexual masculinity that is vastly liberating (the position of Steven Cohan), while in a classic essay on *Meet Me in St Louis* Minnelli is said to construct a highly disturbing portrait of traditional US family life (the position of Andrew Britton). That they later made

The Band Wagon (1953) together-- arguably the finest musical of either artist's career --I thought provided a fascinating opportunity to analyse their contrasting approaches to heterosexual life in the musical. A final reason that initially drew me to select this pair was the knowledge of Astaire's real life sexual orientation as a heterosexual man and recent revelations of Minnelli's real life sexual orientation as a gay man.⁸

In the beginning I was interested in determining to what extent (and in what ways) the differences in their depiction of heterosexual love and identity might be due to the contrasting sexual orientation of each one. Soon however my attempts to find such a connection became not only too complex, but too tenuous as well. In time this aspect of my thesis was abandoned.

The structure of this thesis is logically elegant. I devote two chapters each to Astaire and Minnelli, with each pair of chapters comprising an entire section. Section 1 explores Astaire's stylish archetypal image, and for this reason I analyse the role in which all the iconographic elements of his star persona find their most complete expression-- namely, his Jerry Travers character in the 1935 *Top Hat*. In examining the form of heterosexuality Astaire embodies in that film, I not only look at the way in which he is constructed but how

he acts toward Ginger Rogers's Dale Tremont. Furthermore, I investigate in what ways she has a very different relationship to the world, and the many instances in which it is not equal to his. In the second Astaire chapter, I analyse the reasons why his archetypal image was rigorously undermined during the musicals he appeared in during World War II. Here I examine an odd screwball comedy musical he did with Rogers in 1938 called *Carefree* that seems to presage the radical changes to his screen image that he was soon to endure. Next, I look at a wartime era musical titled *The Sky's the Limit* (1943) in which the drubbing he received is perhaps most fully presented. Here I analyse the effect such an undermining had toward the way Astaire is depicted and the manner in which he relates to women.

Section 2 explores Vincente Minnelli's two key Forties musicals-- *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) and *The Pirate* (1948) --with a chapter devoted to a discussion of each.

In contrast to the figure of Astaire, I argue that Minnelli treats heterosexuality with an extraordinary warmth and care. And whether Minnelli constructs a Jane Austen version of heterosexual love and identity (*Meet Me in St. Louis*) or champions a New Woman model (the conclusion of *The Pirate*), few auteurs in world cinema

are as sensitive to questions of gender equality as he is in these musicals. In *Meet Me in St. Louis* Minnelli displays a deep sympathy toward the traditional US family, but it is also one in which he reveals its essentially precarious, painful, and even sinister side.

Yet just as it is a richly complex work, *The Pirate* puts across a sense of sexual liberation leading to artist possibilities that are almost certainly unmatched in any Hollywood film of the period or even today.

Finally, in Section 3, I seek to answer the question: what would be the form(s) of heterosexual expression in terms of love and identity if Astaire and Minnelli were in the same musical? Who would change whom (particularly in light of how Astaire's star image changed during the Forties) or could their different depictions of heterosexuality exist within the same narrative? Astaire and Minnelli had, in fact, worked on two previous films before coming together again to make *The Band Wagon*. But what is different this time, and what takes place in this specific film that transforms each auteur by bringing out the best in both men? Because it was the last project in which they worked together, I do not investigate any other changes each one might have made regarding heterosexual love and identity in their musicals afterward (as for example,

Astaire in *Funny Face* [Donen, 1957] and Minnelli in *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever* [1970]). My analysis of *The Band Wagon* thus concludes this thesis, with my examination of the film's last production number (the "Girl Hunt" jazz ballet) neatly summarizing all that has gone before.

END NOTES

1. Richard Dyer, "White" in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 141.
2. Jon Ward, "The Nature of Heterosexuality" in *The Nature of Heterosexuality* ed. Jon Ward (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p.147.
3. Dyer, op. cit., p. 143.
4. Frederick Turner, *The Culture of Hope: A New Birth of the Classical Spirit* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 147.
5. Ward, pp. 149-60. See also: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 303-32.
6. Dyer, "'I Seem to Find the Happiness I Seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical" in *Dance, Gender and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas (London: MacMillian, 1993), pp. 49-65.
7. David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 28.
8. David Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* (New York: Hyperion). According to Shipman, Minnelli's homosexuality was, like that of other members of the Arthur Freed unit (such as Roger Edens, Charles Walters, and Robert Alton) an open secret on the MGM lot. His brief marriage to Judy Garland was, as it turned, another of Hollywood's "lavender" arrangements due to her bisexuality.

Chapter 2
TOP HAT: Letting His Wish Provide the Occasion

Was he good-looking? I think so, because charm is
the best-looking thing in the world, isn't it?

Audrey Hepburn on Fred Astaire

Introduction

In her review of The Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers Book, Pauline Kael praised it ("this is the best book that will ever be written about Astaire and Rogers") but parted company with author Arlene Croce on her reading of essential aspects of Astaire, and thus of Astaire and Rogers. Whereas Croce saw Astaire as a heterosexual romantic figure who "transforms" Rogers from "brass to gold under his touch," Kael felt that it is only in their impassioned dances that he personifies "the fantasy of being swept off one's feet." Moreover, Kael held that under his thrall she loses something of herself, namely, her characteristic sassiness and bite:

Rogers seems most fully herself to me in the comic hoofing showing-off numbers, and that's when I love her dancing best; in the more decorous simulated passion of the dramatic dances with Astaire. . . she's not quite Ginger.⁹

What attitudes both critics shared toward the heterosexual antics of Astaire and Rogers, however, are as significant as those areas where they differed. For them, Astaire employs song and dance to inspire in Rogers the desire to be with him. Yet such a romantic partnership ends up not to be a mutual undertaking with a roughly equal amount of give-and-take, but a resist-and-surrender process on her part. Just as Rogers does not remain quite herself during a swooning number like "Cheek to Cheek," Astaire does not undergo an alchemic change either due to her influence or to the feelings between them. In contrast to his hermetic ego, "Rogers was, as a partner, a faithful reflection of everything Astaire intended."¹⁰

Gilles Deleuze says that Astaire embodies one extreme of grace in that he seems to have an "infinite consciousness."¹¹ It may seem a contradiction that an individual housing such transcendent qualities (grace and an infinite consciousness) might be shallow (Astaire's hermetic yet swamping ego and complete emphasis on style). But the traditional Western theology of the devil reveals that a figure can be thus constructed, for like the devil Astaire employs grace and an infinite mind only for ends that are limited and self-absorbed. Though the Romantics did interpret the

devil in a sympathetic light so as to make him one of their own, such a comparison nonetheless exposes his Romantic persona as the ultimate disguise or manipulation for one so truly Classical. His covert Classicism is shown as one where he enjoys a cinematic grace or perfect ease with objects and events in the world, but also one where he consumes Rogers by turning her into an image of himself. Unmasking Astaire's counterfeit Romanticism in dance to ascertain his ontological status is, as I will argue, the initial means of examining the nature of his heterosexuality and the type of relationship between him and Rogers. I will begin this chapter by uncovering his construction as a Classical figure by looking at his happy conjunction with the world, infinite mind and skill, and thorough self-containedness. For my analysis, I will look at *Top Hat* (Mark Sandrich, 1935) because it is the one RKO-Radio Pictures musical as much about Astaire (it is archetypal in assembling and/or introducing all major elements of his screen image) as it is the team of Astaire and Rogers.

If, as I argue, Astaire is really a Classical figure in the most patriarchal mold, how is it that he seems a Romantic of the most liberating kind? What is it about him that beguiles the sharp, assertive, and beautiful

Rogers into relinquishing her identity and agency? The reason, strangely undeveloped in Croce and Kael, is, as Audrey Hepburn understood, his charm.¹² Astaire might well be constructed without expressive gaps-- or as Stanley Cavell has put it, in such a way where "his wish provides the occasion"¹³ --but it is an imperial Classicism camouflaged by a lyrical charm. Since it is his charm that allows her to mistake his exalted ego for a Romantic's spontaneity and equalitarianism, it becomes the critical aspect for any discussion of heterosexuality in *Top Hat*.

Indeed as the script was being drafted, he wrote to its producer complaining of his off-putting role. As he explained, "I am cast as a straight juvenile & rather a cocky and arrogant one at that-- a sort of objectionable young man without charm or sympathy or humour."¹⁴ His own description is in line with my reading of his character, except that in the end Astaire succeeded in making his otherwise unappealing character attractive through charm. Because his charm allows him to fabricate a bogus Romanticism to disguise a dictatorial but disarming Classicism, any study of him needs to locate and examine this quality in his star persona. Delving into *Top Hat*'s heterosexuality by analysing his charm is crucial since he is so convincing as a

Romantic. As I will argue, the power of Astaire's ostensible Romanticism comes from his seemingly musical being-in-the-world-- whether or not he happens to be in a context of song and dance. Part I will look at his two solo numbers where I will investigate his covert Classicism. Following that in Part II, I will examine the function of charm in relation to the Astaire image by looking at his dancing with Rogers in the three duets they share. Consequently, an accurate picture of his screen identity will emerge and, thus, a truer description of the sex and gender dynamics between him and Rogers.

Part I

Dancing with the World: Astaire's Covert Classicism

The figure of Fred Astaire implies that dance is the perfect form, the articulation of motion that allows the self the most freedom at the same time it includes the most energy.

Leo Braudy, The World in a Frame

Top Hat opens with an unusual sequence. The feet and knees down shot of Astaire and Rogers dancing at the beginning of the title sequence may seem consistent with a musical that expresses itself through the movement of dance. Yet the way this introduction is filmed departs from Astaire's renowned style wherein the dance, be it a

solo or duet, is photographed in full shot. He chose this method for filming dance to uphold the integrity of the body. (He likewise insisted that: dances be filmed in a single take, they be filmed directly and neither filtered through objects or décor nor obscured by persons or activity in the foreground, and there be no cutaway shots to show audience reaction.) Not wishing to privilege or emphasize one part of the body over another (or one dancer over another), Astaire had the camera move with the dance. For this reason, Gerald Mast remarks that the Astaire and Rogers duets are, for example, "really trios"-- the two dancers plus the dancing camera.¹⁵ Other types of coherence are suggested by this method of filming dance. Again taking their numbers together as an example, photographing them in this manner designates Astaire and Rogers as a romantic couple. Moreover, it conveys that they enjoy an unbroken connection with the world because they are seen sustaining perfect symmetry as they tap, waltz or otherwise whirl across space. This credit sequence reveals that Astaire was not always successful in getting himself or the film director or the studio chiefs to adhere to his style. Nonetheless there is an amazing consistency in the choreography of his musicals regardless of specific director or studio. Astaire's approach to dance in the cinema is therefore the primary

means of understanding his shrouded Classicism.

Astaire's relation to the world is established early in *Top Hat*, with the first number "No Strings (I'm Fancy Free)." Although it is a solo routine, it also establishes the entirely different way Rogers is positioned in the world. Up in his colleague/producer Horace Hardwick's hotel suite, Astaire's Jerry Travers reveals an enchanting resourcefulness in his fluid incorporation of objects and events as he becomes transported by his singing and dancing. In what is among the most phenomenological of film numbers, he blends, with an infectious happy-go-lucky casualness, "found" objects and transpiring events that manifest a personal freedom committed to nothing but itself. The number is in fact a reply to Hardwick's urging that he settle down and marry. With an invincible gaiety, he counters with a response conveying an independence that is ready for action. The whimsical autonomy he radiates begins with the rapid yet seamless progression of him talking to talking-in-song to singing. The transition is so smooth that it is not easy to separate the discrete vocal shifts as his monologue turns into melody:

In me, you see a youth who's completely on
the loose:

No yens, no yearnings, no strings,
No connections
No ties to my affections
I'm fancy free--
Free for anything fancy.

Now unambiguously in song, Astaire continues his lyrical
freedom manifesto:

No dates that can't be broken
No words that can't be spoken
Especially when I'm feeling romancy.

Like a robin on the tree
Like a sailor who goes to sea
Like an unwritten melody--
That's me!

So bring on the big attraction
My decks are cleared for action
Especially when I'm feeling romancy.

To emphasize the current of his liberty and
vivaciousness he runs through the song again without a
word change. Simultaneous with his progression from
speech to song is his equally smooth passage from
stationary elegance to uninhibited dance. No narrative
cues prompt these dual transformations, so that his
actions feel wholly spontaneous. Underscoring both his

footloose autonomy and the idea that dance allows "the self the most freedom at the same time it includes the most energy,"¹⁶ Astaire utilizes things that either appear to aspire toward dance or are assimilated by him to become part of dance itself. As to the first, his singing style strains (and succeeds) in projecting the rhythms or movements of dance by modulating such aspects as phrasing, timing, pitch, and diction. Importantly his vocal strength rates only a cut or two above modest.

In this way, his singing permits heterosexual men to imagine that if they could sing at all to a desired sweetheart they might sound something like the suave and sophisticated Fred Astaire.¹⁷ Yet as he soon reveals, his "ordinary" voice actually harbours an exceptionally expressive range. In this number, with impeccable ease, his singing style exudes the buoyant tone that will become even more fully realized in the dancing that follows.

At the beginning of the third stanza Astaire goes from seated and relaxed to standing and animated. In the process he uses his body (especially his hands and arms) to mimic or suggest the examples of free-spirited individualism alluded to in the lyrics (a robin, a sailor, an unwritten melody). He closes his first rendering of the lyrics by performing gestures that

reinforce the feeling, for instance, that his "decks are clear for action." However when he goes through the song again he subtly starts to subsume objects and events to create a playful sovereignty. While Astaire sings he rhythmically incorporates a soda siphon's shots from drinks he is mixing, and then, all within the syntax of dance, he taps his hands along an art deco banquette surface, "escorts" his manager across the room to answer the telephone, catches a fallen white statue and dances with it, hugs the hall ash can as though it were a dance partner, soft shuffles Rogers to sleep using sand from the tin, and then, with bent knee, falls felicitously into a chair fast asleep. Just as his reedy voice makes it possible not to recognize at once its surprising intricacy and musicality, the ad-libbed sense of his dancing also deflects from the painstaking engineering behind its extemporaneous aura. He uses the everyday in the service of dance to make it appear as if dance is not only the perfect expression of individual freedom, but that all things become transformed by it.

What "No Strings" makes clear is that "In Astaire, as in Chaplin and Keaton, we see versions of the myth of singularity."¹⁸ This singularity derives from an easy finesse or unaffected dexterity each one enjoys which, in turn, makes it seem as if they move in the world with

a kind of natural choreography. The final result is that, as with the silent screen comedians, the divide between world and ego feels erased in Astaire. From this perspective it appears that when Cavell and Mast describe the existential status of any one of the three artists, they could well be expounding on the other two.

For instance, just in the way Chaplin and Keaton are thought by Cavell to enjoy a special "ontological equality" with objects and events in the world, a similar compatibility is true of Astaire. Meanwhile, Cavell's discussion of Astaire's resourcefulness-- one which causes "the world to dance to his music" -- is also characteristic of the balletic Chaplin and Keaton.¹⁹

What gives rise to the singularity embodied by the star personas of these three? According to Mast, it is each artist's skillful consciousness or mind. In other words, they are defined by their mental ingenuity and not their (unimpressive) physical looks. In Astaire however, perhaps more than in Chaplin or Keaton, skillful consciousness is realized to such a degree that it seems as if it were infinite.

In the photogenic myths of Hollywood, Chaplin and Keaton were deficient as physical human beings: too small to compete in either the world of men (in battle) or women (in love).

If their little figures are outmatched they are not outsmarted. Chaplin and Keaton

translate their imaginative agility into miracles of physical exertion and determination. Astaire was in the same physical boat-- not tiny, but thin, too old, balding, not at all lovely to look at. But beneath this. . . surface is Astaire's wisdom. He is the most knowing of screen figures, usually incapable of error. As Jerome Kern put it, 'Fred Astaire can't do anything bad.' Astaire knows something at the beginning that it takes everyone else the entire film to discover.²⁰

Nonetheless there is an obvious difference between the Thirties Astaire and the Twenties Chaplin and Keaton: Astaire outmatches and outsmarts the world. If the Little Tramp and the Great Stone Face could not bodily compete in the fields of combat or romance, Astaire finds no threat from men or love withheld him from women. (It must be added, however, that the actions of Chaplin and Keaton do eventually turn out in a serendipitous, Rube Goldberg manner). Such a happy predicament enhances the generous compensation (the world as his ally and skill guided by an infinite mind) Astaire is granted due to his limited "grasshopper lightness."²¹ I will investigate all of these areas in greater detail as I continue to analyse his construction in *Top Hat*. But suffice it to say that he is a figure devoid of expressive gaps. As "No Strings" shows (and

the rest of the film confirms), he is never seen struggling to represent himself in language or action. This correspondence, which I take to be a defining element of Classicism, could not make him more opposite from what is felt from the truly Romantic personas of Greta Garbo, Ronald Colman, Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, James Stewart, Judy Garland, and James Dean. Whenever I use the often notoriously complex, sometimes contradictory terms "Classicism" and "Romanticism" in this thesis, it is strictly in this sense alone. This one narrow distinction between them seems to me a consistent one, despite changes in the overall meanings of each approach to the world as these terms have evolved over time.

For this reason, what is felt with Astaire is not romance (which entails true exchange and the possibility of pain and loss), but as he himself sings in "No Strings" something "romancy." What he desires is an Esquire-type rendering of freedom and autonomy-- a course of living that is light, playful, easy, fun, and offers no challenge to his heterosexual self-containedness. This important distinction between romance and romancy discloses the sensibility really informing the number. However an irony occurs during "No Strings," namely, that the same action that declares

his freedom and autonomy (the vehicle of song and dance) becomes the one that launches a mating ritual with Rogers. As a result, does Astaire's romancy view of freedom and autonomy deepen to romance? That is, is it seen that Astaire becomes free enough to choose relational commitment and autonomous enough to expand himself through union? The answer is that the energy he exudes in pursuing Rogers (both in narrative and number) shows that there is an enhanced sense of freedom and autonomy-- but it is one that occurs without loss of his self-containedness. How? By making her a mirror of himself while making it seem that she is more fulfilled, more herself. He is able to keep his imperial Classicism due to actions that look like romance but remain only romancy.

That there is no change in direction from his romancy disposition is evident by the ease with which Astaire's Travers enlarges his freedom and autonomy to include Rogers's Dale Tremont. All of the qualities that depict his relationship to the world (ontological equality, infinite consciousness and skill, self-containedness), remain as characteristic of him after meeting her as before. In the sportive exchange between them that divides "No Strings" into two parts (a two minute forty-five second break within the number that is another

deviation from the Astaire design), she seems to find him "worthy of quarreling with"²² as he thinks her worthy of chase. While it is uncertain whether their sparring has led her to fall in love with him, her true feelings soften from sarcastic disdain to secret bemusement. Their exchange, on the surface one of (his) attraction and (her) aversion, masks what is actually an allure between them beneath her barbs and his impishness. Though they are gorgeously dressed in every scene (the excuse being that he is a stage star and she is a model), even what they wear hints at an underlying chemistry due to the way their attire appears to anticipate what they wear in their elegant dances later as a duo. (He is in an immaculate tuxedo while she has on a silver peignoir set.) In this way the sequence becomes one of challenge within a charged pursued/pursuer game of heterosexual love.

Inasmuch as their first meeting during the middle of "No Strings" is contest it is also theatre. Falling into conventional mating ritual role-playing, Rogers keeps up an annoyed disposition even as she turns her back to him and smiles. To complement her part as the pursued, he performs with a teasing aggression the part of the pursuer. Nowhere is he more impudent than in his tongue-in-cheek plea that she wrap her arms around him

to help relieve his "affliction"-- dance. Given Astaire's ontological status, it is only congruous that as he chats up Rogers the camera seems of a piece with him. This comes across in the way he is framed during his bursts of dance that initiate and close their exchange. Just as Astaire's flirting is earnest but tongue-in-cheek ("Every once in a while I suddenly find myself dancing"), the way he is framed likewise imparts an integrity followed by a debilitation of that integrity (full shots alternating with medium ones). To be exact, these full shots (whole) and medium shots (mutilating) seem to be redolent of Astaire's (undivided) interest and (dissembling) facetiousness towards her. Significantly, his full shots always include Rogers completely in the frame making it so his body's integrity in dance is linked to what will be their integrity in dance as a couple.

Like the wisecracking chorines she played in Berkeley musicals (the sassiness and bite that Kael feels is her real self), Rogers holds her own against Astaire in their initial encounter and gets to have the parting remark. Yet already Astaire not only sets the pattern for their relationship (linking his integrity in dance to what will be their integrity in dance as a couple), but pulls the strings throughout "No Strings." After

meeting her, this is seen in the skill and ease with which he successfully employs dance to have her drift back to sleep. (His sandman routine works so well that it also brings slumber to him and Hardwick.) Throughout the number dance functions in exactly the way Brady says it does for Astaire (the perfect form allowing him the most freedom); here it permits him to show off his whimsical autonomy, be the means that brings Rogers to meet him (however unintentionally), and tenderly puts aright the trouble he has caused her. Still it is the very skill and ease that he continues to demonstrate after meeting her that shows that Astaire has not advanced from romancy to romance. There is a tonal change in the number (from the boisterous first half to the warmth of the second half), but the transition is too polished to indicate love or any chinks in his self-containedness.

Astaire's Travers is the only character encoded with this ontological status, because his will be the only male figure whose sexuality is unequivocally heterosexual. (This aspect will be discussed more later.) The superior position accorded to him and male heterosexuality is best seen in contrast to the position of Rogers's Tremont. Ethan Mordden, for instance, recognizes what Deleuze refers to as his infinite

consciousness, and does so while indicating the absence of this unique quality in her. Rightly so, he views these uneven character constructions as a stock feature of the Astaire-Rogers arrangement: "Everyone in these films is at least a little crazy; the fun of it is that Astaire knows this and Rogers, each time, has to learn it."²³ As opposed to him therefore, Rogers does not enjoy a skillful consciousness or the world as her ally.

He acts and she is acted upon; as a result, he is as much confident and carefree as she is dependent and often confused. Denied her own expressivity, Rogers is never given a solo-- especially one like "No Strings." This gender design in heterosexual love based upon the integrity of men and the corresponding contingent position of women is endorsed in *Top Hat*, and unlike, for example, a screwball comedy such as *Bringing Up Baby* (Hawks, 1938), never called into question. This model of heterosexuality is cogently summarized by the doomed Christina (Cloris Leachman) in the film noir *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955). In her conversation with crime dick Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker), she gives it a corrosive send-up in the way she accurately describes the imperially self-contained detective:

CHRISTINA: You're the kind of person who never gives in a relationship, who only takes. (Her voice going from expository and accusatory to sardonic and facetious) Ah, woman, the incomplete sex. And what does she need to complete her? (Mockingly dreamy) One man, wonderful man!

HAMMER: All right, all right. Let it go.²⁴

Hammer's response is an admission that what she says is true, and a startling aspect of *Kiss Me Deadly* is how nakedly his brutality and narcissism are exposed ("All right. You're got me convinced: I'm a real stinker" he sneers but does not deny under questioning by government investigators who similarly characterize him). But whereas the pulp violence of his heterosexuality is made explicit and his vulgar "What's-in-it-for-me?" egotism finally blows up in his face, *Top Hat* upholds the untroubled superiority of Astaire's Travers throughout while making him irresistible and engaging and at worst likeably, but not annoyingly, obnoxious.

As utterly expressive of Astaire's persona as "No Strings" is, it is his next solo in *Top Hat*, "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," that stands as his archetypal number. Positioning him as spectacle it presents and

epitomizes all elements of his screen iconography as a sophisticate and modern dandy. In a circle of cinematic Anglo/US debonair gentlemen who include Cary Grant, David Niven, Leslie Howard, George Hamilton, and others, Astaire typifies, as Camille Paglia says, "a singular male beauty, witty and polished, uniting sensitivity of response to intense heterosexual glamour." Having a smoothness and elongation "best shown off by a gleaming tuxedo" ("smooth in manner and appearance, long in ectomorphic height and Nordic cranial contour"),²⁵ the number provides him with the look that became his signature image. It better serves as his classic number than even "No Strings" due to how his ontological equality is shown while the superiority that follows from his incomparable status is also hugely beguiling but rendered more overt. Indeed, this closing aspect reinforces the seductively chic yet elite air suggested in his attire.

"I just got an invitation through the mail," Astaire announces in song after he enters the title production number and has moved to centre stage with a dance chorus falling in the background. With the all-male chorus dressed in the same ritzy evening wear as he, the stage invitation that is his excuse to go out and "breathe an atmosphere that simply reeks with class" is but an

extension of a telegram he had received seconds before asking him to the Lido to meet Rogers. In what is only the opening display of his fit with objects and events in "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," this simple link allows him to move easily from narrative to number. As with "No Strings," Astaire blurs what are discrete activities in a way redolent of the blur between his ego and the world of the number. This is seen in how his striding back and forth across stage is a mix of purposeful march, rhythmic bounce, and jaunty casualness-- in short, walk-as-dance or dancing walk.

At one point during the middle of the number after the lights have dimmed and he is alone in a corner of the stage, there is a segment where he seems to be responding to some unseen threat. Consisting of dance flourishes that combine pantomime-like movements which momentarily freeze to form a series of dramatic poses, the resourceful flair with which he fluidly incorporates various forms of self-expression in dance is another example of this blur. And what is true of his harmony of movement is true of his harmony of speech. For just as in his first solo where there was talking, talking-in-song, song, and an area in which it is hard to distinguish between these categories, there is something like that phenomenon here. However instead of a linear

progression from one vocal expression to the other, each of the three exist almost together in the second solo. While the entire vocal syntax of the number is certainly one of song, it is one where he talk-sings or sing-talks most of the lyrics as Rex Harrison does in *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964). Unlike, say, "Isn't This a Lovely Day (To Be Caught in the Rain)?" and most of all "Cheek to Cheek," the cadence, while animated, is kept fairly regular and with a minimum of high notes. Such a music structure allows him to deliver the lyrics without any apparent strain, and quickly and with force. In spite of the effusive image of luxury conveyed visually and in the lyrics, the actual words of the song are spoken like dialogue in a spirited, conversational manner and not in elite tones. But whenever he wants to give special stress to a specific word or rhythming scheme, he alters his vocal style from talk-singing or sing-talking to true singing. Such a shift, when it happens, occurs at the start and/or finish of a sentence:

Oh, I'-m puttin' on my top hat, tyin' up my
 white tie, brushing off my t-a-i-l-s.
 I'-m dudin' up my shirt front, puttin' in the
 Shirt studs, polishing my n-a-i-l-s.

It is precisely Astaire's perfect Classical economy that sets him apart-- and above --others. Since only his character possesses an ontological equality and thus a skillful consciousness toward all objects and events, he commands the title number as the outline of the Eiffel Tower and the Parisian lampposts do the set design.

Encoded with such a superior rank, this construction accounts for more of his singularity (and showstopping effect) than him simply being the star of the show. Nowhere is his supremacy as manifest as in his interaction with the chorus. Added to the introductory dance arrangement they perform in anticipation of him, the chorus creates a wide path in the middle of the stage to provide for him an impressive entrance. Once he enters and goes past them to the front of the stage, they form three attentive rows behind him and imitate his actions (changing body tilts, staccato tap, the blend of walking and dancing). Consequently, the chorus men occupy the role I will argue in Part II that Rogers will play in relation to Astaire: as his subordinate in a way that winds up accenting him.

But she is never openly presented as expendable as the chorus men are during the number's shooting gallery finale where he uses his cane to bring down all the human targets. His action may be read as an imaginative

response (his feet making the sounds of bullets coming from his "firing" cane) to the sense of threat or menace I mentioned above. Despite an overall vagueness, this is a feeling suggested by his pantomime-like movements and the dark atmosphere of that section of the number. When the chorus men march back on stage immediately afterward, what has just taken place gives them a slightly sinister tinge as if they might be Mafia and not fancy men-about-town. I contend, however, they are made to feel ominous only as an excuse for him both to display his general naughtiness and to exert his absolute power. He is far too whimsically self-contained for his behaviour to be understood as upholding freedom against oppression-- where would the passion or conviction arise? When he does rebel it is mischievous and fun (as in the Thackeray Club episode).

The impression of superiority conferred upon male heterosexuality, due to the construction of Astaire's Travers can be compared and contrasted with the arrangement of Humphrey Bogart's Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941). As the hardboiled private eye in this, the prototype of Hollywood film noir, the formidable control Spade exhibits by and large throughout the film is always traceable not so much to his logical cunning, duty to justice, or code of

professional integrity, but to a tyrannical heterosexual machismo. As a detective trying to discover who is behind a rash of murders related to the priceless ornament, Spade is positioned above the villainy of suspects Brigid O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor), Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre), Kasper Gutman (Sidney Greenstreet), and Wilmer (Elisha Cook, Jr.). As such, he seems to act as the moral referent within the criminal world of the narrative. But instead of having a tough-guy exterior that masks a sentimental morality, he is actually a neurotic egomaniac who dominates and manipulates everyone around him. Imparting a shallow self-contained humanity fearful of love and affection, Spade denigrates others by mocking anything that is feminine or homosexual: constantly commenting on Brigid's performance as a "helpless" female ("You're good; you're very good"); pointedly using "boyfriend" before the lieutenant of detectives (Barton MacLane) as a term of insult to disparage him; twice beating up on the effeminate homosexual Cairo ("When you're slapped, you'll take it and like it!"), and with a gleeful sadism that anticipates Mike Hammer, heaping ridicule and embarrassment upon the "boy" and "gunsel" Wilmer. (In pulp literature of the period "gunsel" could mean a petty hoodlum as well as a man who took the bottom position in sex with another male.)

Because she assents to Spade's authority, the sole figure he treats with respect is his loyal secretary, Effie Perrine (Lee Patrick). Yet even with her, he can only compliment the unfailing help she provides by placing her in a masculine register ("You're a good man, sister"). Cold-hearted and self-serving, Spade is the law-and-order *homme fatale* to Brigid O'Shaughnessy's deadly black widow. He triumphs, but the price of victory is that he is alone and that which he admits to being "all" of him (the vulnerable or "feminine" feelings of love toward her) must be eliminated, allowing him to maintain his detached and stoic self-containedness. In their final moments together, Spade utters the film's most cynically disturbing line, "I'll have some rotten nights after I've sent you over, but that'll pass."²⁶

Bogart's Spade is not a flawed hero but a phallic narcissist; in this way, he shares with Astaire's Travers a surface Romanticism cloaking an overwhelming self-containment. Aside from Travers's "shooting" of the chorus men, he is never as aggressive or overt as Spade in maintaining his absolute ego. While each character remains largely unruffled amidst both shifty (*The Maltese Falcon*) or shifting (*Top Hat*) characters and coiled plots, and, moreover, demonstrates a supreme

dexterity in moving through such narrative worlds, Astaire never has to prove himself against the challenges wrought by individuals or circumstances. Though they are seen as self-contained, the world is not the natural ally for Spade as it is for Travers. The despotic self-confidence he projects follows from his engagement with, and eventual win over, deceitful dames, slow but intrusive police, criminal masterminds, and minor thugs. Despite these dangers, Spade sustains his governing ego but it is at the expense of loneliness, neurosis, and existence at the edge of society.

Contrary to the loss or dismemberment that Spade must pay for his self-containment, Travers is totally accommodated by every aspect of *Top Hat*. Instead of a treacherous lady, he is given the snappy but ultimately "ecstatic dependency" of Tremont;²⁷ rather than being placed among menacing heavies, he is surrounded by a triangle of mincing sissies-- Hardwick (Edward Everett Horton), his manservant Bates (Eric Blore), and the dressmaker Alberto Beddini (Erik Rhodes) --that permit the androgynous Astaire to appear virile by comparison; and in lieu of isolation, derangement, and marginality, the film ends not only with him and Rogers merrily clicking their heels together as a heterosexual couple but doing so within cosmopolitan society. Few movies

magnify such all-around self-containment and then endorse it with such unqualified textual compliance as Astaire enjoys in *Top Hat*. The superior position of male heterosexuality is thus affirmed in the film but without a hint of the competitive insecurity replete in *The Maltese Falcon*.

The comparisons of singer-dancer Astaire's Travers with the rough Spade of Bogart and the even more intractable Hammer portrayed by Meeker, show that they are all planted in exceedingly traditional constructions of heterosexual masculinity (clear in their radical autonomy, ascendancy and control, and functional skill-as-skill). Always active, and never passive, each one commands not so much a "to-be-looked-at-ness" as a "to-be-looked-up-to-ness." And since Astaire's Travers exudes none of the hysteria exposed in Spade or the "systematic discrediting" that is directed toward Hammer,²⁸ his is the most deeply secure heterosexual masculinity. Moreover Astaire enjoys a physical and emotional expressivity never viewed in the noir detective, thereby revealing a wider surface range in the ambit of conventional manliness. Such an understanding of US masculinity problematizes Marcia B. Siegel's broad assertion that dancing renders men suspect of homosexuality:

Dancing is an equivocal activity in any society that places a low value on the arts in general, but it becomes even more dubious where men have been celebrated as kings of the frontier, masters of the gun, the ax, and the plow. The specter of homosexuality-- or at least societal inadequacy--haunted generations of American male dancers and still exerts its influence.²⁹

Even more, it refutes Steven Cohan's Laura Mulvey-influenced idea that because Astaire is positioned as showstopping spectacle that he occupies the same static icon-like construction of women, thus "feminizing" him.³⁰

Cohan's reading (and by extension, Siegel's) ignores Astaire's deeper Classicism with its ontological equality in conjunction with all objects and events, infinite mind leading to a skillful consciousness, and thorough self-containedness all of which he conceals with romancy charm. (One cannot imagine these qualities as descriptive of Ziegfeld's ornamental beauties or Berkeley's goldiggers-- examples cited by Mulvey as instances in the US musical.) In the next part I will examine the orchestration of Astaire's charm by studying his numbers with Rogers.

Part II

Dancing with Rogers: Charm and the Ego Sublime

Beyond almost any other Hollywood team, Astaire and Rogers appear to express male-female equality, a balanced interdependence. But even here the equality is more apparent than real: one habitually speaks of Rogers as Astaire's partner, rather than the other way round, which neatly sums up the ambiguity of the term 'partnership' here.

Robin Wood, "Never Never Change, Always
Gonna Dance"

Rick Altman has written that the American film musical presents a different narrative design than other movie genres offer. Rather than being plot or action-driven, musicals distinguish themselves by their emphasis on characters (specifically the central heterosexual couple) thereby breaking the rules concerning standard narrative economy. They employ what he calls "a dual focus narrative" by structuring a series of parallelisms between the man and woman comprising the film's core lovers. To illustrate this idea, Altman examines the story patterns of two seemingly contrasting musicals (Robert Z. Leonard's 1940 *New Moon* which stars the popular duo of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald, and Minnelli's *recherché* *Gigi* featuring Leslie Caron and Louis Jourdan), to reveal the way in which the numbers establish the differences between the couple only then

to have the songs express an ever growing give-and-take between the man and woman. In both movies, each character learns to adopt the qualities of the other. Only when this happens does each film close. Therefore rather than "focusing all its interest on a single character, following the trajectory of her progress," Altman writes that the American film musical:

has a dual focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values. This dual-focus structure requires the viewer to be sensitive not so much to chronology and progression-- for the outcome of the male/female match is entirely conventional and thus quite predictable-- but to simultaneity and comparison.³¹

If Altman's analysis of the narrative thrust of the musical is as accurate a norm of the genre as Astaire's rule that his dances be filmed in full shot, then *Top Hat* is a definite exception to this model. With Rogers having no solo numbers while Astaire has two, an imbalance is created which makes the idea of a tantamount bond between them, as Robin Wood notes, "more apparent than real."³² As I examined in Part I, his solo routines are major instances of his conjunction with the world, infinite consciousness and skill, and thorough self-containedness. In this way, he enjoys the most

sublime ego (not to be confused with Keats's egotistical sublime) and it continues unabated in his trio of dances with Rogers. Yet the closest he and Ginger come to an equality between them occurs in their first duet "Isn't This a Lovely Day (To be Caught in the Rain)?" While continuing to exhibit the qualities I have listed, Astaire permits Rogers an expressivity that she will have nowhere else in the film. As a result it is, as Croce asserts, *Top Hat's* "most enchanting number."³³

"Lovely Day" is a "challenge dance," that is, a number where each person tests the other to discover whether they make a compatible couple. Because in six out of 10 of their musicals together they project a competitive, sweet-and-sour romantic bond, such numbers serve a critical function ("Pick Yourself Up" in George Stevens's 1936 *Swing Time* is another notable dance of this type). Yet what offsets the playful contest between them is that he already knows he wants her, while she is seen judging whether she likes him; in this way, the sense of mutual audition is not really true of this number. Indeed one of its most beguiling features is that aspect of "Lovely Day" where she is seen determining whether he measures up to what she wants in a lover-- before she then demonstrates to him that she is his equal (not ontologically but in dance skill).

However, since "Lovely Day" is very much constructed on his terms (her masculine outfit, his singing/serenading to her, her initial copying him in dance, their handshake at the end), he cannot only afford to be magnanimous in allowing for an equality between them in dance but can use this sense of equality as part of his scheme to win her over. In both the singing and dancing portions of the number, the degree to which Astaire is in control of every aspect of "Lovely Day" cannot be minimized. And because this control is always in the guise of equality, neither can his charm.

Like "No Strings" Rogers finds herself trapped in a certain space at the start of "Lovely Day" and forced to engage with an Astaire who is positioned as the agent who can solve her problem. On the surface they appear as dilemmas with very different causes; after all, though his tap dancing had woken her up "like an angry naiad from the foam"³⁴ in the former, he can be hardly responsible for the rainstorm that drives her to take shelter in a park bandstand in the latter. However since he enjoys a connection to the world where his wish provides the occasion, even nature cooperates with him throughout the number to seduce her. Not only does the rainy atmosphere allow him to be alone with her, but the thunder and lightning transform her emotions towards him

at three crucial points in the number. (Turning up in a hansom cab, his sly offer to rescue her with the cry "Cab miss?" is three times repeated so that in the end he seems to be saying "Can't miss!") The felicitous aid that thunder and lightning provide to expedite his charm not only send her flying into his embrace, but advance what is always Astaire's vehicle of lovemaking: song and dance. (Depending on the number, "lovemaking" is either meant in the sense of pitching woo or to suggest missionary-style heterosexual intercourse. In "Lovely Day" the sense is the first one.) Here thunder and lightning act as the dual cues that allow him to begin singing to her, and then serve to bring them in to one another's arms as a couple by shifting the rhythm of the music into double time as they dance around. As playful as he is disingenuous, Astaire croons to Rogers that "The thunder and light'ning seem to be having their way" in the casual introduction (22 bars) before confessing in the song proper that, ". . .the clouds broke./They broke, and oh, what a break for me."

His perfect fit with nature (the weather, no less!) discloses his untroubled Classicism. The musical structure of "Lovely Day" is also fundamentally classic both in being the most formulated of popular songwriting styles (the song proper has 32 bars expressed in 4/4

time) and in its use of rhyme creating a sense of order or closure in the lyrics. But within this standard arrangement the metre is loose, thus allowing for a lyrical wit that is gamesome and at times unexpected. Tightly organized by rhyme, its musical structure does not rein in the song's playfulness but permits it to flourish. Astaire accentuates the lyrical wit of "Lovely Day" in his interpretation of the song, and this is a delicious source of much of the charm in his singing. The actual words of the song communicate romance, but the effect is romancy since its swooning qualities are beholden to an overall balance-- despite its lively irregular metres.

The introductory section to "Lovely Day" is enough to illustrate the shifting poetic metres within the unchanging rhythmic design of the song. There is nothing singular about this arrangement of music and words; surely nothing experimental or arty (songwriter Irving Berlin's style is hardly a counterpart to the prose, say, of Modernist Gertrude Stein, a period figure mentioned by Rogers to the Beddini character in the next scene). On the contrary, a large number of the songs of this era share this same structural dynamic. (Even the lengthy introduction is fairly conventional, think of, for example, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" or "They

Can't Take That Away From Me" by George and Ira Gershwin in Mark Sandrich's 1937 Fred and Ginger musical, *Shall We Dance*). Usual or not, in defining lyrical wit through a striking use of rhyme, the organization of this song seems redolent of the construction of Astaire in *Top Hat*.

The introduction to "Lovely Day" consists of two stanzas:

The weather is fright'ning, the thunder and
light'ning seem to be having their way.
But as far as I'm concerned, it's a lovely
day.

The turn in the weather will keep us
together, so that I can honestly say
That as far as I'm concerned, it's a lovely
day-- and ev'rything's OK.

While the speed of the music or tempo remains constant in regular 4/4 time, the metres are irregular. In comparing each verse, the rhyme scheme is -A-A/B/B for the first one and -C-C/B/B/B for the second. Both begin with internal rhymes that provide telling semantic contrasts which, when juxtaposed, further declare nature as Astaire's ally ("fright'ning"/"light'ning" in the first stanza becoming "weather"/"together" in the following one). The precise number of iambic beats is

also the same in each verse (11), until the lilting--and wonderfully unanticipated --close of the second stanza ("and ev'rything's OK") adds some extra beats. This final line is elegant in the way it epitomizes the essence of Astaire's playful self-containedness, his charm. This is seen in the manner it places emphasis on the order of the rhyme scheme ("OK" capping "way"/"day"/"say"/ "day"), while its very unevenness in regard to the metric pattern gives the song an improvised air and imparts a spontaneity in lyrics to match those felt in his dancing.

At this point the song proper begins ("Isn't this a lovely day to be caught in the rain?"), the introduction being just 10 measures short of the length of the song proper. Yet the tone remains the same, with Astaire presenting to Rogers the sense of effervescent optimism in each section ("I can see the sun up high though we're caught in a storm"). But perhaps the most charming aspect of his singing in the song (and another quality both sections share), is the beguiling sweep of Astaire's vocal delivery. In his singing, there is a constant movement (more circular than linear) from the jaunty, happy chappy to the swooning or more seemingly heartfelt. As such, his singing style is truly transporting in the manner he starts with the ordinary

(in looks he even resembles Stan Laurel) and goes to the extraordinary (he looks angelic when he hits high notes), and back again but always advancing upward-- to dance.

To the extent that Astaire is at his most beautiful when he sings (instead of being handsome), Rogers is at her most beautiful when she listens.³⁵ As the pursued rather than the pursuer, she does not demonstrate any of his assertive qualities during the singing portion of the number. However as the two-shot in which they are framed shows, her listening is just as active as his singing. In this way, the power to initiate romance is assigned or granted to him while she is given the power to accept or reject his offer of affection. Consequently, there is a balance of power constructed between them even if it is impossible to imagine their roles ever being reversed. The two-shot they are photographed in puts across this parity (they are seated next to each other with him slightly behind her), for the camera never privileges his romancy entreats over her reactions (or vice-versa), but discloses their behaviour simultaneously. As Astaire beguiles her through the charm of his singing, Rogers is thus seen judging the effect of his actions by an open array of emotional expressions that play across her face.

For example, responding to when he croons

Just when you were going leaving me all at
sea, the clouds broke.

They broke, and oh, what a break for me.

she beams with swelling delight. When he sings about seeing the sun shining even in the midst of the rain, her face registers mistrust-- that is, until she realizes that what he says is to be understood in a figurative and not in a literal way as reflective of his feelings. Hence there is a sense, as John Mueller writes, that "it is Rogers who controls the game."³⁶ By the song's close ("Let the rain pitter patter, but it really doesn't matter if the skies are gray./Long as I could be with you, it's a lovely day.") he has succeeded in overcoming much of her cranky resistance, but she has made him earn her attention by being haughty and slightly hard to get. In the dancing that follows, Rogers proves that she is worth the effort and is his equal in dance.

The equality between them that is somewhat understated or refined in the singing portion of "Lovely Day" is made surpassingly clear in the dance segment. Nonetheless this equality is simply one of ability, for Rogers dances in his style (always on his terms) and

does not possess his singular ontological status. Astaire begins with his characteristic dance-like walk and invites or challenges her to join him. More in jest than in attachment, Rogers follows his whistling of the opening line of the song proper with her own echo-like whistling of the second line before accompanying him in his dance-stroll. Once together, Astaire sets in motion the idea of what Mueller calls "sequential imitation" or a series of moves which, not as he claims, has one copying the other, but is always Ginger copying Fred. Still, his description of how this specific dance design is used to transform them into a couple is accurate:

At the beginning the imitations are done in mock spite; in the middle they are done as a kind of gift from one dancer to the other; and at the end they are done in a spirit of cooperation. Thus a single choreographic idea is developed to suggest emotional progression.³⁷

As they move from mock spite to gift-giving to cooperation, their dancing becomes less jokey and competitive and more exuberant and connective. Like the men of the chorus, Rogers begins dancing by mimicking his actions (imitating his mannish strides, putting her hands in her trouser pockets similar to him, executing a burst of tap to match his). Contrary to the male

chorus' deference toward Astaire, however, her mood is teasingly combative. With skill and ease she demonstrates her ability, and their equal talent permits them to advance to side by side and then mirroring movements. As Richard Dyer sees it, both dance arrangements "suggest the thrill of instinctive rapport, but the former suggests the experience of it with someone who already is like oneself," whilst the pleasure of mirroring suggests "becoming like someone else."³⁸ Certainly with mirroring they start to relish one another, trading in their comic rivalry for shared delight. And though Rogers continues to copy Astaire even as they finally move together arm-in-arm, there is no closer moment of equality between them in *Top Hat* than in the pair of instances where he spins her only to have her spin him in return!

The promise of equality suggested between Astaire and Rogers in "Lovely Day" is gone in "Cheek to Cheek." In this, their most famous number, she totally cedes herself to his care and control. Mirroring is practically excluded, the side by side movements are reduced, and the startling mutual spins are replaced by backbends with him dipping her lower and further to the floor. Rogers goes through "Cheek to Cheek" as if in a spell while he remains lucid; this, despite the fact

that they are both supposed to be in blissful love. (Indeed it is he who had sung "I'm in heaven.") But it is vital to understand that the very narrative conspires with him to bring about her willing surrender. The force of his charm and those of the story elements never merge in the entire film as successfully as they do in this number in allowing for his complete possession of her. For this reason any examination of "Cheek to Cheek" must again appreciate how he is constructed in relation to the musical and nonmusical regions of *Top Hat*, and see how his bearing is the primary source of his overall charm towards her. Specifically, I want to elaborate on the way Astaire transforms the world without himself being transformed.

During each of the numbers Astaire converts the flat world of the film and transforms it into something vivid. Unlike a musical in which the narrative and numbers are both vivid (for example, *Meet Me in St. Louis*), *Top Hat* only comes alive in the dance segments.

Humorous moments run throughout the film, not the least including the variety of gay aspersions flung upon the Hardwick, Bates, and Beddini characters, some of the repartee between Fred and Ginger, or funniest of all perhaps, the relaxed sarcasm of Horace's wife, Madge (Helen Broderick). Nevertheless, the comedy feels

strained and perfunctory-- especially when compared to the great US social comedies of the Thirties made by Capra, McCarey, Cukor, and Hawks or those directed by Renoir in France during the decade. Astaire transforms the flat comic narrative in one of two ways: firstly, by utilizing objects that either appear to aspire toward dance or are assimilated by him to become part of dance itself (as seen in "No Strings" and "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails"); or secondly, by filling out space through the agency of dance ("Cheek to Cheek"). (These operations come together flawlessly in "Lovely Day.")

In Deleuze's discussion of Astaire's infinite consciousness, he says that in dance Astaire's gestures "link up through a clear will of the intellect without surrendering movement to body." In writing about the meaning of dance in the Hollywood musical in Cinema 2: The Time-Image, what he describes particularly expresses Astaire's use of dance to fill out or transform space:

. . .dance arises directly as the dreamlike power which gives depth and life to these flat views, which makes use of a whole space in the film set and beyond, which gives a world to the image, surrounds it with an atmosphere of world. . .³⁹

For instance, in "Cheek to Cheek" Astaire sports Rogers away from the crowded dance floor by means of a fox trot and into their own large and stylish ballroom. As he leads her across a bridge from the smaller to the more extravagant space, an orchestral flourish swells on the soundtrack underscoring this great transition. (Because the flat comic narrative is always set within incredible art deco sets, the film does not move from narrative to number as much as it seems to move, as Deleuze might say, from "spectacular to spectacle."⁴⁰) The significance of Astaire filling out space is that as he transforms the world through dance he finally gives order to the film's narrative. Dyer observes that in the utopian type song and dance sequences found in the American musical, these sequences are a solution to the social tensions or sense of inadequacy or absence found in the narrative. For him, abundance replaces scarcity, energy replaces exhaustion, intensity replaces dreariness, and so forth.⁴¹

This is fairly true of the situation in *Top Hat* except that the plot is beset by too much freedom. All the playful running around in the plot reveals a world that seems to be crying out for order to settle the silly confusions, and to have something of conviction or sincerity to replace the mindless frivolity. That the

film does have certain structural symmetries (for example, starting in a hotel in London and ending in one in Venice, the leitmotif of Fred three times using tap to make himself known to Ginger, Bates opening and closing his role with a conversation on neckties), only accentuates the confusion within the narrative and creates the feeling of structured chaos. Therefore "while one error may be a misfortune and two a sign of carelessness" as Mast tells, "an entire cosmic universe of errors defines error as life itself."⁴²

As a result nearly all the characters entertain various positions of "a-morality" or endlessly flexible behaviour. *Top Hat* is full of fake marriages and false weddings, characters pretending to be those they are not, and abiding scenes of mistaken identity. Not surprising, at one point Hardwick, himself a figure with a double response to everything-- the first immoral, the second socially proper, moans "Oh dear, some more of these plural personalities." Even the playful treatment of sexuality represented by supporting characters Hardwick, Bates, and Beddini is best understood within this context. The fact that such early stock Hollywood portraits of gay men were built upon the oxymoron of them being at once gay and heterosexual falls neatly in line with *Top Hat*'s construction of identity as confused

and shifting.

For instance, Hardwick and Bates are in the midst of a "tiff" when they are first introduced and are not speaking to each other ("family squabbles?" Astaire's character asks), although later it is revealed that Hardwick is a married man and indeed suffering from a guilty conscience because of a slight afternoon adventure at the zoo with another woman. Beddini is likewise shown in a way that insists upon his heterosexuality while declaring his homosexuality. A curious meld of Latin lover (his motto is: "For the woman, the kiss; for the man, the sword") and fussy dress designer ("Never again will I allow women to wear my dresses!"), his most memorable line is perhaps: "I am no man, I am Beddini."

Consequently the film erects a view of heterosexual marriage that is acutely cynical. Since instability and disarray reign crazily in the plot and character constructions, when Madge lectures Rogers's Dale about the sturdy shelter of married living ("In spite of the fact that all men are male, there is no feeling so secure as having a good, reliable husband-- I know") the comic ridicule directed against heterosexual marriage empties it of any legitimacy, and turns it to an oppressive arrangement in the mind of Dale. The only

character with a code of personal integrity or honour (morality)-- Beddini -- ends up as the complete loser.

Matters are so farcical that even Tremont sees she has but little choice but to play along (especially in light of the film's treatment of Beddini as a fool for maintaining standards of personal honour or integrity).

Not having Horace's dichotomous reflex (id versus superego), his butler's fluidity ("We are Bates"), or the amused, world-weary aspect of Madge ("My dear when you are as old as I am you take your men as you find them"), she finally gives in to the lunacy that is the film's world. Nonetheless she still retains a sense of conviction, and thus a lack of performative dexterity, that does not allow her to gain the upper hand over Travers.

Though puzzled by her behaviour, Astaire instead frightens Rogers by his playfulness rather than her frightening him by her made-up tale of an old affair between them. Even here, he remains on top of the situation by exercising humour and humiliation to turn the tables on Rogers's masquerade ("recalling" that her name had been Madelaine and nicknaming her "Mad"; enquiring whether she had put on weight, and "still" had a weakness for diamond jewelry). Thus unlike Astaire who had feared in "Lovely Day" about being left at sea,

it is Rogers who is forever adrift (alone, powerless) in the plot no matter what she does or does not do. Except for the time where she despairs and lets Beddini talk her into marrying her (a decision preceded by a close-up of her looking hopeless), this is never truer than what occurs during "Cheek to Cheek." (Her hasty decision has the effect of making her fate identical to Madge's.) The number does not start until she abandons herself fully to her superficial environment, that is, until the instant Rogers allows herself to become loving towards Astaire despite her misconstrued idea that he is her friend's weaker half, Horace ("Well, if Madge doesn't care I certainly don't"). Rogers begins to be reconciled with the cynical plot and its inhabitants--that is, except for a look of sedate sadness beneath the radiance of her exquisite face as he sings to her "Cheek to Cheek."

In the song and then particularly in the dance, he transports her to a location of pure truth-- "heaven." As with "Lovely Day," he reasserts a Classical order through dance. But rather than being an area that calls for the suspension of belief (as is often true of numbers in musicals), their dance duets express the only truth of the film: that Astaire and Rogers belong together in spite of the plot that keeps them apart.

Indeed this is the utopianism of the numbers. Though they form a more constrained space than what is found in the "anything goes" narrative portion, it is the very rules found in the design of dance that allows for the expression of love and even sex. Instigated by Astaire, it is the Classical order found in dance that allow them to express their truth. At the same time, however, it is an order and truth expressed solely in his terms.

As is the case with the plot throughout *Top Hat*, it is Rogers who is tricked during "Cheek to Cheek" into believing something about Astaire that causes her confusion and moral distress. Constantly the joke is on her. To be fair, there are occasions when he does not know quite what is happening either. But it is never crucial knowledge-- knowledge that matters-- in contrast to the knowledge denied her. Rather than these light episodes forming a source of anxiety for him, they are the opposite: taken by him as scenes of incentive and/or reassurance within the pursued/pursuer challenge of heterosexual love. For instance, the first time she slaps him (following "Lovely Day") it only boosts his desire to pursue her, while after the second time (following "Cheek to Cheek") he sighs dreamily, "She loves me." In this way, Astaire is constructed as opposite to Rogers in that he prevails regardless of

what he does or does not do.

Cavell has shown that in the great Thirties and Forties Hollywood comedies of love and remarriage, men as well as women within heterosexuality had to experience overwhelming confusion in order to acknowledge something of significance about the personality of their partner--and eventually, themselves.⁴³ But in *Top Hat* the Astaire character does not go through such processes, and does not learn anything about the Rogers figure or himself. Instead he occupies an almost divine position in the way he is the centre of all transforming yet is never transformed himself. This reveals the real meaning of him crooning to her "I'm in heaven" in "Cheek to Cheek," and the reason why he is so lucid as they dance while she is clothed with rapture. (With her white ostrich feathered dress she makes a perfect angel or plaything for his own private heaven.) The astonishing grace with which he sings "Cheek to Cheek" (one of Irving Berlin's longest and most difficult songs, a composition spanning 72 bars and having both a major and minor release), only adds to his charm and to the sense that all things are possible for him.

Since his star persona was built on his Travers role, aspects of such elegant divinity are made explicit in many of his musicals. This is seen, for instance, in

the endings of *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (H. C. Potter, 1939) and *The Belle of New York* (Walters, 1952) in which he dances with his partner (Rogers and Vera-Ellen, respectively) upward to heaven. These qualities are also viewed when he poses as a celestial creature to swindle naive rich girl Lucille Bremer in *Yolanda and the Thief* (Minnelli, 1945), as well as in his more philanthropic disposition towards orphan Leslie Caron who fantasizes that he might be her guardian angel during a music sequence in *Daddy Long Legs* (Jean Negulesco, 1955). Finally, in *Royal Wedding* (Donen, 1951) he defies gravity by dancing on the walls and ceiling in the solo "You're All the World to Me." (A foreshadowing of his special status is found even in his first screen dance number where he and partner Joan Crawford hover over the earth on a magic carpet in Leonard's 1933 *Dancing Lady*.)

Rogers surrenders herself entirely to Astaire in "Cheek to Cheek" and her reward seems to be the final number "The Piccolino." Her surrender in "Cheek to Cheek" is all the more comprehensive if it is interpreted, as Jim Collins does, that her series of backbends lower and further to the floor suggest male/female sex and orgasm with the musical crescendos greatly underscoring this.⁴⁴

In the passionate look Rogers gives him immediately following the dance, Sue Rickards wants to ascribe to her some power: that of creating meaning by having her gaze eroticize Astaire in a reversal of the general Mulvey argument.⁴⁵ Though her intense and deeply fervent stare at him shows that she has been transformed under his sexual skill and regards him with desire, nevertheless it is a reactive response to who he is and what he has just done; in this way, she is set up as acting as a signifier to his signified. Attributing even this power to Rogers seems less than, say, fright and terror being conferred upon King Kong as a result of Fay Wray's screams. This is because Kong, one of cinema's grand but least likely Romantics, wholly venerates Wray and is always seeking a means to connect and make himself understood to her. Of the totally self-contained Astaire nothing like this is communicated; most of all, in the brief scene just after "Cheek to Cheek." With him in a 45-degree profile while she stands in direct view before the camera, he searches her face to read the effect he has made on her. What is lacking from the scene, however, is the slightest sense of him having undergone a similar transformation within the dance due to her actions.

Nothing declares Rogers's surrender as much as the fact that if their movements together suggest sex, then it is adultery that is being conducted between them-- that is, at least from her point of view. Tempering what would be Rogers's otherwise transgressive behaviour is that given the chaotic or amoral plot, there would be little or nothing to transgress even if she were not wrong about Astaire's identity. Her surrender to what she thinks is an affair allows her to entertain flexible behaviour, and thus sets in play her becoming a part of the anarchy that is the world of *Top Hat*.

With "The Piccolino" she is made one with the film's world. This last song/dance seems to celebrate this achievement, and naturally, though it is enjoyable, it is the movie's silliest and least memorable number. Not surprisingly, it is the one tune from the film not to have attained a spot within the Berlin canon as a "standard" or "classic."

If "The Continental" from *The Gay Divorcee* (Sandrich, 1934) was a bodacious combination of Berkeley-style choreography (flash-pans, cuts of various speeds, dissolves, and a flair for dance as human kaleidoscope) and trendsetting dance craze à la Fred and Ginger's first dance together ("The Carioca" from Thornton Freeland's 1933 *Flying Down to Rio*), "The Piccolino" is

a kind of light parody of "The Continental." (The dance direction of Berkeley, "The Carioca," and the nearly 18 minute "Continental" are light enough to begin with.) Making fullest use of the sets which show Venice as a never-never pleasure area-- lazy gondolas in sparkling canal waters, candy-cane lampposts, ornate bridges, terrazzo squares of black and white, tiered outdoor cafés --the effect is so terrific that, unique for the film, spectacular threatens spectacle.

The lyrical content of "The Piccolino" is redolent of the tone or feeling of the film as a whole. This is not due to its frivolity as much as it is how the music of the song generates a particular impression which the words later undercut as not being authentic. Just as the tone or feeling of *Top Hat*-- created of course by the Astaire figure-- seems Romantic but is really romancy, the origin of "The Piccolino" with its Latinesque musical undercurrent is not dreamy Venice but, rather, working-class New York. Though

By the Adriatic waters
 Venetian sons and daughters
 are strumming
 a new tune
 upon their guitars.

the twist is that actually "The Piccolino" is a composition

. . .written by a Latin
a gondolier who sat in
his home out in Brooklyn
and gazed at the stars.

and who sent his melody overseas to Europe where it became a hit.

The singer is Rogers. It is the only time she sings in the film, and it is notable that she is not given a song that announces her freedom and autonomy ("No Strings"), shows her volition and power (the title tune), or advances her relationship with Astaire (both "Lovely Day" and "Cheek to Cheek"). Moreover, in her singing she never once uses a pronoun like "I" or "my" to express anything of herself, though not any of Astaire's songs in *Top Hat* would be possible without the first person singular. Instead she sings a song that describes a current vogue (just as she did with "The Continental" but this time the rage is a song and not a dance) and the success of another person (the one who started it-- a man, naturally).

Yet the mood of the song, and also of the dance, is one of frolic and gaiety as if something is being

celebrated. The gesture that the number concludes with, in fact, is Astaire and Rogers merrily raising their champagne glasses in victory. The question is, why this happy action? What have they triumphed over or gained which has them clink their glasses at the end? An enormous part of the answer is that the social world of the movie finally embraces the one essential truth of the entire narrative: that Astaire's Jerry and Rogers's Dale belong together. Moments before the number she at last discovered that he is not Madge's husband. Her confusion is relieved but it is significant that she dances with him, since she is still under the impression that she is married to Beddini. Hence, for a second time, she dances with him despite the (false) understanding that what they are doing is illicit. Even so, the number privileges their romantic bond by showcasing them not only as the central heterosexual couple the choreography is ultimately built around, but as the relationship which personalizes the chic yet synonymous heterosexuality suggested by the two dozen or more identical dance couples who otherwise fill "The Piccolino."

With this fifth and final number *Top Hat* more than recognizes the truth that Jerry and Dale belong together-- it elevates their relationship above the

identical couples surrounding them as well as a pair like the Hardwicks who are literally, at this moment in the plot, at sea. And in contrast to the couples whose movements in dance often involve disabling relations of dependency with the men using their long leash-like cummerbunds both to manoeuvre and control the women, Fred and Ginger seem to have achieved equality between them. (A ground level, point of view shot taken from the rear of a slender woman's lifting dress-- very Berkeley and therefore very sexy and sexist --is indicative of the sensibility of the number.) For example, as they step out to dance it is not possible to determine who is leading. Furthermore, their motions consist not only of mirroring, but, as last seen in "Lovely Day," each one is seen spinning the other. Their dancing is lively and joyfully energetic, and exudes a solid confidence (most of all on her part) that goes beyond what they displayed in "Lovely Day" or "Cheek to Cheek." Is their apparent equality possibly one other, maybe even deeper, reason for the festive feeling between Astaire and Rogers in this number?

In conclusion, the answer is yes. However on whose terms is this equality? In other words, under what conditions is Rogers allowed the assertion of self? In "The Piccolino" she is finally granted her own song.

But as explained above, it is hardly "her" song in the sense of expressing anything of herself. Also when she sings there is no two-shot of her and Astaire in the frame as there had been when he crooned "Lovely Day." During her singing, there are brief cutaway shots of him exactly at the start, middle, and end. For the most part her singing is photographed with her alone in a medium shot, and thus he is not forced to listen. Missing is any trace of her characteristic sassiness and bite, and she croons in his style: jaunty and colloquial, and then swooning. Earlier, in "Cheek to Cheek," he had sung of "the charm about you" in the way he adored her; here in "The Piccolino" she is actively allowed to display it, but since she has become like him it is a romancy and not romantic charm. Their dancing too, though equal, is again on his terms-- that is, footloose and "fancy free." Her singing and dancing reveal that Astaire has given her a measure of space and freedom, but it is only enough to inspire her to become like him. He has consumed Rogers by his charm, and it is a testament to his skill that she should come to view her diminution as deliverance.

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Chapter 3
 CAREFREE and THE SKY'S THE LIMIT:
 The Male Chorus' Revenge

In the team spirit of the war years, which coincide with Astaire's own fall from stardom, the anonymous chorus [whom he had executed in *Top Hat*] takes its revenge on the singular star.

Gerald Mast, Can't Help Singin'

Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that Astaire's seamless conjunction with the world, infinite consciousness leading to graceful skill, and thorough self-containedness render him such a singular figure in *Top Hat* that he appears divine. It was an invincibly external elegance only, and his particular genius was in making what was a romancy disposition seem like a Romantic one through the charm of his phenomenal singing and dancing. His type of urbane cinematic gentlemen, one possessing a sleek head and polished evening wear, exemplifies a heterosexual masculinity that promises "candour and courtesy," and certainly as Astaire showed in *Top Hat*, "eroticism without ambivalence or suffering."⁴⁶ Exquisite but scarcely human, his sophistication, though it is limited to surface and style, is a model of perfection. This is perhaps best summed up by Gilbert Adair who writes that "Astaire. . . might have personified Style as other, medieval forms

personified Chastity and Avarice."⁴⁷ Or as David Thomson describes Astaire in his Biographical Dictionary of Film:

In musicals, Astaire is the man without character; sometimes not so far from the man without humanity. But in the musicals, this is not so much a shortcoming as an audacious emphasis on style. Astaire is preeminently the saint of 1930s sophistication, the butterfly in motion until he dies, whose enchanting light voice kids the sentimentality of the songs. (He is a great singer-- no wonder all the songwriters wanted him -who treats the songs with reverence.) He is the man about town, empty of personality, opinions, and warmth, but a man who carries himself matchlessly. There is something of the eighteenth century dandy in his preference for taking nothing seriously, save for the articulation of his superb movement.⁴⁸

Of the narcissism displayed by his celestial dandy in *Top Hat*, no aspect was grander yet more disguised than the manner he consumed Rogers through dance. The dances served as utopian or "heavenly" sequences for Rogers because of the way they provided relief from the anarchy of the narrative and its fluctuating characters. But it was Astaire who always controlled the dance sequences, his charm making her gradual surrender seem liberating

even as Rogers changed to become an extension of him. Thus the numbers function as the sole areas of truth in the film, but as I discussed in the last chapter it is truth that operates exclusively on his terms.

My view of the construction of heterosexual love between Fred and Ginger's characters, and more specifically, that of the role which the musical and non-musical sequences play in this construction, could not be more opposite than the thought on these subjects as conveyed in the popular mind and in much of film writing. The approach by J.P. Telotte in his essay on the Astaire-Rogers series is typical of the standard view. In it, he argues that their movies offered Depression-plagued audiences the message that self-expression and love (as found in dance) could triumph over the forces or figures (as found in the narrative) that sought to limit or restrict them (as Fred and Ginger succeeded). According to Telotte the numbers are areas of expressivity distinct from the conformity encircling Astaire and Rogers. This attenuating conformity aims to separate them as a couple and diminish them as persons; their response was to open up the narrative world by making it poetic through dance.

Even as Astaire and Rogers extended that lyric impulse into the real world, there abided a sense of limitation or confinement, at least a feeling of how unexpressive that larger world essentially remained.⁴⁹

However as my analysis of *Top Hat* showed, the dance portions were regions of the movie that offered stability and order in contrast to the prevailing chaos that defined the narrative. Actually the problem was too much expressivity (freedom) in the narrative, and what drew Rogers toward Astaire (the source of his attraction or charm) was the order he furnished. Yet, as I revealed, though he "transforms" her, he is never transformed by her.

Six years after the release of *Top Hat*, in the same year that saw America's entry into the Second World War, Astaire's screen image underwent a dramatic (and devastating) transformation of its own. In each of the eight musicals he starred in from 1941 to 1946, he no longer enjoys an ontological equality with the world and hence a singularity that derives from such omnipotence.

The three-fold sources of his romancy charm that I analysed in his Jerry Travers role in *Top Hat*, are absent and/or enfeebled in these wartime era movies. His singularity, though, is not destroyed altogether but is reduced to a more "human" register and then hugely

diminished.

For example, in the pair of musicals I will be looking at in this chapter, first, the 1938 *Carefree* (a film with Rogers that is a harbinger of things to come for him during the war period movies) and, second, the 1943 *The Sky's the Limit* (a strange and somber film with the war itself as a constant backdrop), Astaire is cast in parts where he is not encoded with a seamless conjunction with the world and an Infinite consciousness. However he manifests an ideal of one abridged form of thorough self-containedness: namely "mortal" though still impossibly mythic rugged individualism. He portrays a psychoanalyst in *Carefree* (modern psychiatry being, as the film depicts, a therapeutic approach that isolates one from all emotional interdependence such as romantic relationships in order to be healed), and a fighter pilot and womanizer in *The Sky's the Limit*. What is remarkable about each film is the degree they are pledged to showing such fabled autonomy either as one premised on self-deception or as one that leads to anxiety. Laying bare the estrangement and/or restlessness of his individualism changes his constructed masculinity and thus the form of relationship Astaire has with his romantic partners. Whether these films present such

self-containment as a mode or status that is primarily delusional (*Carefree*) or ultimately vexing (*The Sky's the Limit*), so totally do they explore his troubled state that undermining the notion of rugged individualism is their central thrust. Such an impetus is seen not only in the narrative regions, but carries over into the numbers. In this way the areas of song and dance seldom fulfil a utopian function (in whatever sense a musical chooses to organize or define the "utopian"), and frequently, as in "One for My Baby" from *The Sky's the Limit*, they offer no satisfaction or reprieve. Instead, they often transmit the opposite feeling by revealing an even deeper helplessness and frustration within his now punctured singularity.

I agree with Mast's position that it was World War II that caused Astaire's screen image to alter so drastically. He explains that a solo stylist like Astaire went counter to the collective effort necessary for winning the war. His own films undermine him since the singularity he personified threatened, ironically, democracy. The films are anti-Astaire because that period of the Forties was anti-individualist, particularly to one who had embodied thorough self-containedness. Thus there is a second drama going on in his wartime musicals: a social reaction larger than what

the plot or character construction of any one film pits against him.

He was no more a communal foot soldier than a communal jitterbugger. . . .Armies are teams; even those who stayed at home had to join the American team in some way or another. How could Astaire join a team if he didn't inhabit the same universe as anyone else?⁵⁰

One compelling proof of this argument is that after the war Astaire went back to enjoying his status as a celestial dandy. This return to his archetypal persona is seen in musicals ranging from *Easter Parade* (Walters, 1948) to *Silk Stockings* (Mamoulian, 1957), but in his wartime films he pays the price for being singular. At this time, argues Mast, there is a (figurative) sense in which the male chorus of *Top Hat* exact their revenge on him.⁵¹

To illustrate, only at this time does the once unthinkable occur. In the space from *Top Hat* to these eight movies Astaire goes from having the world by its tail to a man sucker-punched by fate, and it is no exaggeration to say that there is a genuine spitefulness directed towards him. On fully three occasions he loses the star actress, twice to Bing Crosby (*Holiday Inn* [Sandrich, 1942], *Blue Skies* [Stuart Heisler, 1946]) and

the last to a Chinese gentleman ("Limehouse Blues" in *Ziegfeld Follies* [Minnelli, 1946]) where he is not even allowed to tell the woman of his dreams that he loves her before he dies alone. Tellingly, too, this was the only time that Astaire played criminals (Yolanda and the Thief, "This Heart of Mine" in *Ziegfeld Follies*). Yet the greatest blows to Astaire and his screen image are found in those movies where dance itself is used to sabotage him. This is first seen in the "Snake Dance" number in *The Sky's the Limit* wherein a fellow Flying Tiger makes him perform an embarrassingly feminine "cooch" dance on a canteen table-top; the second, and even more abject, instance takes place in *Blue Skies* during the "Heat Wave" spectacular. Here, owing to his character's destructive carelessness, he ruins the production by his drunken fall from a high stage arch while dancing. To add to his embarrassment (and consistent, I argue, with the sentiment against him), *Blue Skies* was the top grossing box office movie of his career to that point. Little wonder he chose to retire after completing that film.

The dictatorial yet disarming Classicism that Astaire hid beneath a romancy charm in *Top Hat* and other Thirties musicals (a notable exception is the "Never Gonna Dance" number in *Swing Time* which I will discuss

in Chapter 6), is practically gone in his films made during the war years. The films which effect the way Astaire is constructed can be divided into three groups.

The first type are those like *Second Chorus* (Potter, 1941) and *Holiday Inn* that show or expose his swamping ego, but without the world as his ally, it is one that is mean, obnoxious, and conniving. In both movies he underhandedly schemes to fleece his best friend (Burgess Meredith in the former, who, admittedly plays just as awful a character as Astaire does; in contrast, Crosby is a nice guy in the latter) by stooping to any level to make off with the lead actress (Paulette Goddard and Marjorie Reynolds, respectively). Thomson fantasizes a movie in which Jekyll is played by Astaire and James Cagney has the part of Hyde.⁵² Yet I think that in these movies Astaire, who considered *Second Chorus* the worst musical of his career, is Hyde rather than Jekyll.

Inasmuch as he is a heel in the first group, he is a helpless hero in the second one. Opposite to how Astaire had been made omnipotent in *Top Hat*, in these movies he is nearly impotent in the realms of love and work. In his musicals with Rita Hayworth, *You'll Never Get Rich* (Sidney Lanfield, 1941) and *You Were Never Lovelier* (William A. Seiter, 1942), as well as the melodramatic "Limehouse Blues" production in *Ziegfeld*

Follies (where he seems to adopt the silent suffering made famous by Richard Barthelmess in D.W. Griffith's 1919 *Broken Blossoms*), Astaire is unable to guide events. He is at the mercy of characters and narrative; "all at sea" just as Rogers had been as Dale Tremont. His charm (such as it is when permitted) has no impact: that he spends a fair amount of *You'll Never Get Rich* imprisoned in an army guardhouse, or that it is Adolphe Menjou and not he who controls as well as motivates the romance in *You Were Never Lovelier* is indicative of how these films position him.

The third group of films includes those like *The Sky's the Limit* and *Blue Skies* where his construction as heel and helpless hero intersect. Here he is the most dislocated and anguished figure in each film, so much so that in a few scenes he is tormented and pathetic. He is made his own worst enemy -- *Astaire Agonistes* -- and only gets enough help from either film to make things worse for him. Even as musicals they are plodding, grating, and nearly unwatchable (in virtually every sense). It is these films, not those where he is rendered Hyde to his former Jekyll, that are the flip side to his Jerry Travers role. The reason for this is not that they combine his heel's lack of charm and his helpless hero's lack of forceful action, but arrange

that he retain just enough of each quality to reverse the idea propounded by Jerome Kern that "Astaire can't do anything bad." In these two musicals he can do hardly anything successful (good), most of all in the crucial sphere of love.

This process of undercutting and/or eliminating the three sources of the romancy charm he enjoyed in *Top Hat* (especially, as I have introduced, his thorough self-containedness) begins with the often overlooked *Carefree*. If by *The Sky's the Limit* Astaire dances on a precipice not once but twice for emphasis, it is in his halcyon period with Rogers in *Carefree* that he first inhabits a character that places him in radically precarious spots and anticipates his Forties musicals. In both films, I will study the disintegration of his charm and how this corrosion changes both the construction of his masculinity, as well as affecting the design and mechanics of heterosexual love between him and his leading ladies (co-stars Rogers and, in *The Sky's the Limit*, Joan Leslie).

Part I

Carefree: Dancing as Rogers Leads

The equalization of difficulties in these films is part of a larger equilibrium, a world in which male authority, or sexual imperialism, is reduced or in abeyance, while the feminine spirit is either dominant or equal.

Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape

The credit sequence of *Carefree*, one that is original and offbeat in its use of finger painting to put across (literally spell out) the production information, launches the film's sportive feel and even hints at its thematic composition. This imaginative opening is meant to be read symbolically, a style of interpretation which the film itself will encourage in the manner it revolves, however simplistically and for comedic purposes, around pivotal knowledge accessed through dreams, trance, and a confrontation Astaire will have with his own subconscious. (In contrast, the actual content of these sequences is direct and literal-- no puzzling or metaphoric Salvador Dali-like dream episodes appear in the film.) In the credit sequence, there is a sense in which its arrangement suggests something of the movie's thematic composition (knowledge or information that the characters lack which will emerge only to be erased or repressed and then reappear throughout the

course of the narrative). Finger painting is associated with informal play and children, that is, with the primitive and infantile, and this sequence, empty of anything related to dance, signals or at least sets up, what will feel like the governing generic disposition of the film. In *Carefree* many of the conventions of the musical (or more precisely, those of romantic musical comedy) seen in *Top Hat* and associated with Astaire and Rogers, will seem to disappear or to take a back seat to the unbridled features and characteristics of a contrasting but related genre, namely, screwball comedy.

The lengths *Carefree* goes to frustrate expectations of it being a musical, much less it being a Fred and Ginger musical, are rather extraordinary. For instance, in his very first scene the Astaire character declares he was not meant to dance. Besides the credit sequence which does nothing to demonstrate that *Carefree* might be a musical (except, of course, for indicating the lead pair as its stars, and having "music and lyrics" by Irving Berlin), his words are just the opener in the process of how the movie works to foil the spectator's foremost assumptions. Other examples: how their initial dance sequence together ("I Used to Be Color Blind") does not take place until almost 25 minutes into the film; how Rogers, whose character is a well-known radio singer, is

prevented by the plot from performing on her own programme; how Astaire and Rogers are teamed with other characters on a dance floor as he croons to her the film's loveliest song ("Change Partners"); and, strangest of all, how Astaire is subjected to Rogers's control in one dance ("The Yam"), while in another number (the instrumental version of "Change Partners") his time with her is interrupted before he can win her over. Though the film is their shortest one together (at 80 minutes it is nearly 20 minutes below *Top Hat*'s running time), it stands out as having the lowest percentage of any entry in the 10 picture series of time allotted to song, dance, or both.⁵³

As Croce writes, "Carefree is more screwball comedy than musical, and it is more Ginger Rogers' film than Fred Astaire's."⁵⁴ Altman, in his American Film Musical, warns about treating definitions of genre too discretely, and any analysis between what I refer to as romantic musical comedy and screwball comedy must understand the overlap the two share. *Carefree* has each type of comedy, and because it deploys them for specific intentions, some description of these terms is needed. To learn the way the film uses the conventions of both genres (in content and style) in its construction of gender and sexuality, I will define these related but different forms of

comedy in the following very broad manner. It is necessary to distinguish the general assumptions each comedy genre has toward the expression of romance between men and women before a closer analysis of heterosexuality in *Carefree* can be made.

Mindful of the overlaps between them (and Altman has posited that what I call the romantic musical comedy of the Astaire and Rogers films "borrowed from and clearly influenced" the very development of screwball comedy⁵⁵), each category is founded on an opposition presented within the central heterosexual couple and in the basic format of the narrative. In both comedy forms, love is seen as a battle between males and females. The source of this antagonism/attraction at the heart of their relationship is that each figure has character qualities that the other one needs to complete them as persons. Consequently, the model of heterosexuality exhibited is always complementary.

A key difference dividing these genres, is that in screwball comedy the woman is able to have the freedom and spontaneity which men enjoy, while in romantic musical comedy the woman can only function in a restrained fashion. In the "war between the sexes" this usually means that in the former category the woman is the main aggressor in courtship or is at least equal to

the man in advancing the arrangement. In the latter category, meanwhile, the woman entertains a compliant role much of the time (at least on a surface level) relative to the dominating man. It is tempting to view screwball comedy as the more progressive form of comedy based on this aspect of gender construction. Yet as my analysis of the complementary relationships between men and women in *Meet Me in St. Louis* proves (Chapter 4), the aggressive female in courtship is vital for the outcome of some traditional models. However what can be viewed as liberatory in the representation of women is not their assertiveness in romance, but in the manner or means they communicate their desire (for instance, the visibility of their desire). In comparison to romantic musical comedy which generally permits women to demonstrate desire only by indirection (the woman's actions being, sometimes even in music, reticent and self-effacing), women in screwball comedy oftentimes communicate, without inhibition, what possesses them. Notably, these heroines of screwball comedy never come off as vamps or tramps though they are endowed with a transgressive dimension. Certain conceits are devised in the plot or character tropes are used within the movie to permit them to be at once libidinous and ladylike. This touches on why screwball comedy has the capacity or potential for a real progressive femininity

and masculinity within heterosexual love. By allowing women to demonstrate the range of expressivity available to men, a situation is created for symmetrical or equal relations between them. This differs from the controlled choices open to women (and thus to men who cannot then appear to exhibit "feminine" traits and/or positions) in the construction of gender in romantic musical comedy.

The ideal that both comedy genres aim for is a balance within the central heterosexual couple. Such a balance is depicted in terms of temperament between the man and woman, which as a result means harmonizing larger oppositions embodied by each person (like, for instance, class differences, small town versus city values, rival careers). Thus both comedy genres aim toward a reconciliation of the opposed worlds that flow from the central heterosexual couple and which, in turn, form the base of the narrative structure. In seeing how such reconciliations are arranged at this simultaneous level of character and narrative, accommodating contrary elements is intrinsic to the dynamics operating within genres, according to Thomas Schatz. Crucial to his examination of Hollywood genres is that their "fundamental impulse" is continual renegotiation. Yet while Schatz frames the ceaseless play of reconciling

dual characters and worlds within a context of US sociology and economics (a dynamic which allows genres to criticize and reinforce prevailing ideology), I will be looking at these accommodations as they apply to the construction of heterosexuality.⁵⁶

Within the syntax of romantic musical comedy, this means striving to harmonize the contrasting flat world of the plot with the more lyrical world of the numbers; in screwball comedy, the opposition is between the mundane world of the established versus the lively world of the absurdly improbable. Needless to say, however, that the heart of the former lies in the song and dance portions, just as the latter really exists for the scenes of lunacy. Indeed, as Molly Haskell has stated, it is through the gags that the central heterosexual couple consummate their love in screwball comedy, as it is via dance (and sometimes song-- though not in the situation seen in the Astaire and Rogers films) that they do so in romantic musical comedy.⁵⁷ Jointly in their visual or rhetorical style and in the evolution of the central heterosexual couple, both categories of comedy relish movement over stasis. The camera is more mobile and fluid in the song and, particularly, in the dance segments of romantic musical comedy, whereas in screwball comedy the dialogue and action become so fast

paced that it feels as if there is a contest between them. The dual narrative worlds found in each genre stem from, or are at least generally redolent of, the main opposition present in the man and woman. Though their union must undergo continual renegotiations, the ultimate coming together of the central heterosexual couple is never in doubt (the experience of the spectator and the conventions of each genre assure this). Therefore their union may be said to be privileged, just as movement is. (It cannot be imagined, say, that Astaire and Rogers will fail in the end to be a couple.) Whatever their backgrounds, what must be constantly renegotiated between the man and woman is a way that allows for their autonomy as persons even as they forge an identity as a couple. Since their union is guaranteed, the way to view whether there is a balance between the central heterosexual couple is the condition or proof Cavell employs for complementary arrangements.

By its own design, union in complementary arrangements is founded on each one in the relationship retaining their own separateness, and moreover on the fact that this independence is mutually valued. In order not to make their partner an image of themselves, Cavell advises: ". . .that one's responsibility to one's desire

is to acknowledge it, and acknowledge its object, i.e., acknowledge its object's separateness from you."⁵⁸

Since *Top Hat* failed in this respect, I will see whether *Carefree* succeeds in having Astaire, and above all Rogers, retain aspects of their individuality. In doing so I will analyse the roles that romantic musical comedy and screwball comedy play in this process of renegotiation.

Carefree begins with a drunk Stephen Arden (Ralph Bellamy) making his way up to his best friend's office to find out the reason for his fiancée's on-again/off-again plans to marry him. Arden's old pal, Dr. Tony Flagg (Astaire), is a Park Avenue-type psychiatrist whose all-purpose assistant Connors (Jack Carson) is seen helping the confused man walk off his alcohol. In a room with eye charts and other medical instruments, the two circle around a harmonica-playing Flagg casually seated on an examining table in the centre of the frame.

For the most part, the lighting (high key) in this introductory scene is evenly distributed. Photographed - or more exactly, choreographed -- in a single take, the scene is organized around motion and repetition (that is, the repetition of the same motions), and this adds to its sense of fluidity. The motion and repetition found in the scene not only revolve around the action of

both men's marathon-like circuit around the relaxed Flagg, but also exist in a verbal gag ("Amanda what's-her-name?") that runs throughout the scene. As Arden discusses the situation regarding him and Amanda Cooper (Rogers), Flagg agrees to conduct a therapy session for her. Yet Flagg is not just unsympathetic towards his friend, he is actually discouraging (Flagg: "In fact she's merely trying to escape reality." Arden: "Escape what reality?" Flagg: "In this case, you."). (Connors is similarly unfeeling; his only interest in Arden's dilemma is hopefully discovering that she may be a "nut.") Flagg's lack of empathy, though, turns to hostility at the mention of Amanda's name, and reveals a startling aversion towards women ("I don't care what her name is. To me, she's just another maladjusted woman."). It is significant that at one part in the scene-- namely, the area where Flagg argues that everybody is trying to be or do something that is opposite to them and thus eschewing reality --that the motions and repetitions (repetitions of the same motions) temporarily cease. Here as he admits with a chuckle and a shake of the head to once wanting to be a dancer on stage (until "psychoanalysis showed me I was wrong"), the motions and repetitions pause to give full effect to his open confession. At the same time, though the motions and repetitions displayed in the scene had a

hectic or harebrained quality, his words identify his decision to be a psychiatrist with stasis.

This is the first image the film presents of Astaire. So much is conveyed (or at least suggested) in this scene that before I look at the way Rogers is constructed, several points need to be made. The first is the economy with which elements of each comedy genre are established. Simply having actors Astaire and Bellamy in the scene achieves this, with the very name "Fred Astaire" synonymous with romantic musical comedy and Bellamy having played nearly the same role previously (and receiving a best supporting actor Oscar nomination for it) in the screwball comedy *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937). Bellamy's prairie-flat Mid-Western drawl, together with a persona connoting stability but no humour or fun, made him screwball comedy's perfect sap (indeed he would repeat this stock role a final time in *His Girl Friday*). Despite the fact that the Astaire character disavows dance as his life's passion, the first thing he is shown doing is playing music. In this way, because their specific words, gestures, or concerns here remain in accord with their larger star personas, something of the outlines of the two comedy genres are set up. But: if Flagg is identified with stasis at the moment he offers his

diagnosis of Arden's situation (self-delusion), and if stasis is antithetical to the heart of both comedy forms, then as other characters circle around him as an authority figure, can they expect help or confusion from him?

The answer, already suggested early in the scene when a tired-out Arden utters "I'm not drunk anymore, I'm just dizzy," is obvious. The answer is not actually contingent as much on such a technical breakdown as it is on the viewer's own awareness that only a deluded Astaire character could hold that dancing was not meant for him. If his character could be wrong about such essential knowledge, could his character be right about anything? As his dancing in the number involving golf will clearly show, he has it backwards: it is practicing psychiatry that is opposite to him. Hence it is he, not Stephen or Amanda, who is self-deluded.

Two things follow from Flagg's lack of self-knowledge. The first is the value of his professional advice because, as events in the film will prove, it is usually counterproductive and-- dangerous. (If one imagines the female patient referred to by Connors in the introductory scene to be a dancer, that is, "the dame. . .in love with her feet," then knowing that Flagg is her therapist does not bode well for the unfortunate woman.)

The second is that because dance serves not only as the principal vehicle of self-expression for Astaire but the main vehicle of his charm in seducing Rogers, by disconnecting dance from him it falls to her to initiate their romance. Yet this disconnection is more than a lack or denial of expressivity because his very consciousness (or infinite mind) is affected, and this means a deeper disconnection from all romantic (romancy) feelings. This doubly places Rogers in the position of having to lead in her relationship with Astaire, and explains why the generic syntax of *Carefree* seems more screwball comedy rather than romantic musical comedy.

Nonetheless it is true, as Croce says, that Astaire is "strangely convincing as a psychoanalyst."⁵⁹ *Carefree* marked the first time he played a character who was not in some way a musical performer (a dancer or bandleader). Astaire makes a credible psychoanalyst since the self-contained, dictatorial ego of Flagg feels familiar after *Top Hat*'s Travers. Stripped of an infinite mind that would allow him to exert a romancy charm, the character of Flagg simply makes explicit those darker facets of Travers concealed by charm. Choosing a stereotypically hyper-cerebral profession over dance (to impress Amanda he will put on, and then quickly take off, eye glasses when first meeting her--

yet will "misread" who she is by introducing himself to the wrong young lady in the waiting room), underscores the detachment of the Astaire persona. His emotional coldness, however, is of a piece with the conservative elitism at the base of his persona and, too, with the imperialism with which he moves in the world. Once again, these unsavory aspects of the Astaire persona are rendered more overt in *Carefree* because he is not granted the qualities that allow him to have a romancy charm.

For instance, both *Top Hat* and *Carefree* open with an establishing shot of a building plaque. In the first musical, it is one which reveals the name of an exclusive London men's circle (the Thackeray Club), while in the second musical it is that of a posh Manhattan professional building ("Medical Foundation").

(Both cater to the select since *Carefree* will show therapy "as a pastime of the idle rich who are short on common sense."⁶⁰) In contrast, however, his Travers character will exit the oppressive club with a disruptive staccato burst of tap, while his Tony Flagg (who is not a dancer) is the Establishment. Yet as demonstrated in *Top Hat*, Travers is no more a rebel than he is a Romantic. Flagg, then, is the image of Astaire but without the romancy sham. The same is true of how

each Astaire figure regards the character played by Rogers. The psychological violence committed by the charming Travers (namely, consuming Tremont's personality) is refined and sophisticated, in contradistinction to the explicit misogyny of the charmless Flagg.

"She's a typical pampered female. What she needs instead of a doctor is a good spanking." Amanda laughs when she accidentally overhears his sexist diagnosis. But when she discovers that these crude remarks were about her in anticipation of their session, she no longer finds him entertaining. She decides to turn the tables on him when he comes back in the office before she can leave. In a series of mostly shot/reverse shots to suggest visually the discord between them, she deftly outmanoeuvres the control-conscious Flagg. Smart and with sassiness and bite, Amanda unsettles him by usurping his throne of authority (chair plus large desk) and having him sit in her seat. She disorients Flagg further by her impassive physical bearing and a brusque conversational style that spins his remarks back to him with a barb. This occurs, for example, when he tries to explain the nature of the subconscious:

FLAGG: *(Clearing his throat and attempting to start afresh by standing up)* Let me put it this way then. *(Pointing to the back of his head)* Back here is a jungle of the most noble and horrible things.

AMANDA: *(nodding her head as if he had made a self-disclosure)* I don't doubt it.

Flagg's hermetic ego, the only quality of the three which Travers enjoyed, is thus reduced from a divine narcissism to a more human yet mythic type of rugged individualism-- and then deflated. The authors of Mental Health in America as well as those of Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life observe that the aim of psychoanalysis is toward a kind of self-contained personality independent or above relationships. Though the presentation of psychoanalysis in the movie is hardly to be taken seriously and is at times quite bizarre (for example, the idea of "dream-provoking foods"), it does get right this crucial insight. Tellingly Flagg says to Arden in the introductory scene, "Perhaps if I analyse you, you wouldn't want to marry Amanda." Describing how psychoanalysis is the only form of psychic healing that cures the individual by detaching the person from community (different, say, to shamanism, ritual, faith

healing), both texts assert that although the therapist withholds value judgments, the "distanced, circumscribed, and asymmetrical" structure of therapy becomes the model of relational well-being for the analysand. Never is there mutual sharing between therapist and client. This is the reason, according to Habits of the Heart, why psychoanalysis was absorbed readily in individualist USA. "Freudian" beliefs and terminology gained currency in popular American cultural discourse around the time of *Carefree*, and though the film deflates Astaire's hermetic ego it will use the therapeutic model as the one for heterosexual romance.⁶⁰

From this scene on, it is Amanda, not Flagg, who is the catalytic figure. With her physical introduction into the narrative, it is Amanda's perspective that propels the film. Their first duet "I Used to Be Color Blind" forms the greatest instance of how her knowledge guides the plot. Agreeing to be under his care, Amanda succeeds in having a dream only to learn that she is in love with Flagg. The number's lush pastoral atmosphere and mock fairy tale iconography (distant castle, overhead rainbow, lily pads) signify it as an obvious pastiche while contributing to its oneiric feel. Framed within a gauze border, he gestures to Amanda in the manner of a serenade but it is their subsequent dance

style that is most effective in conveying the number's romanticism. Comprising what may be the first dream ballet in Hollywood film,⁶¹ the dancing in this fantasy seems to "take place in the air"⁶² because of the constant lifts which are given emphasis by the slow motion photography and costumes (her white flowing Cinderella-type dress and scarves together with his baggy trousers). The number may be said to prefigure the dream ballets at the centre of MGM musicals of the Forties and Fifties (Minnelli's work especially), although it is shot in black-and-white and lacks elaborate camera movements. (It does, however, boast some impressive aspects such as the very fluid moment when the dance changes to slow motion and the fact that it was shot in one take.) Yet it shares with the later MGM musicals (not to mention Broadway productions such as *Lady in the Dark* [1941] and *Oklahoma!* [1943]), a dream sequence expressed through dance and from a single character's perspective.

Unlike what she was allowed to experience in *Top Hat*, this number is directed completely by Rogers's desire. This is seen not only in their rapturous dance movements (as in, for example, her three continuous spirals around him as he lifts her or in their side by side spring together across the water), but in presenting a Flagg

who finally exhibits the coordination he claims psychoanalysis is all about. This coordination is the result of him recognizing his love for her ("Queer!/What a difference when your vision is clear/and you see things as they really are.") and expressing his love through dance. Amanda permits him to ravish her, but it is their kiss at the end (the first ever for an Astaire and Rogers number) that, as Mueller describes in terms of reversing cliché, sees her taking the initiative:

What is particularly interesting about this kiss, however, is the amazing way in which Astaire has taken the most hoary of Hollywood clichés and revitalized it with fresh eroticism. It is intricately prepared for in the choreography. Astaire spins Rogers in a wide swirling lift around his body. As he slows, she gradually regains her footing but continues to turn in his arms. Then, at last, she falls out of the turn and glides over backward as he holds her. They are now in the classic Hollywood-kiss pose: she lies surrenderingly in his arms as he leans over her. But, going against the cliché, Astaire moves no farther; instead it is Rogers who consummates the kiss (after all, it's her dream). In languorous slow motion, she reaches upward, wraps her arms around his neck, and then gradually pulls her body up until her face meets his. Even after their lips meet, she continues to tighten the embrace.⁶³

Over the top as the romanticism is in "I Used to Be Color Blind," their kiss gives it a gentle unexpected poignancy that raises the number above the feeling of simple parody. And in "those ballets which represent the dreamer's wish," as Jane Feuer notes, the pas de deux "foreshadows in symbolic form the eventual outcome of the plot."⁶⁴ This indicates that although much of *Carefree* is shaped in a screwball comedy syntax, its sympathies bide with the fairy tale musical (or with what I have referred to as romantic musical comedy).

Similar to how Amanda holds in her feelings for Flagg (with the result being havoc), the film keeps its musical impulses in check (with the result being screwball comedy). Yet because each genre of comedy is never mutually exclusive, "I Used to Be Color Blind" is like a take off on dewy heterosexual love in romantic musical comedy from a screwball comedy mindset; at the same time, "The Yam" will rely on a goofy ("screwy") dance step to propel it (a forward waddle every time a long note is held with hands flung out to the side palms up). Ostensibly "The Yam" is exactly that kind of vacuous though enjoyable number (in the tradition of "The Continental" and "The Piccolino") introduced by the Rogers figure near the end of the musical. As always, she demonstrates what is supposedly the latest dance

craze to the Astaire character and to the internal and external audience. But *Carefree* takes what is a limited role assigned to Rogers (for instance, she is never given either a dance solo or love song to sing to Astaire), and expands it. This has not so much to do with the number itself, but of it being an extension of "I Used to Be Color Blind." It brings into the real world what Amanda had experienced in her dream fantasy: her desire. For not only does she dance with Flagg, but even its signature lifts are duplicated at its rousing close (*Carefree*'s most famous image) when he props his leg on a succession of dining tables and twirls her high over each.

The main difference between the two numbers is that Flagg has to be blackmailed by Amanda to dance with her in the latter. The movie is never more a screwball comedy than in those scenes where Amanda, acting under an anesthetic or else hypnotized, cuts loose her inhibitions. Once she realizes that she is in love with him, she drops her sassiness and bite and alternates between screwball comedy brashness and romantic musical comedy reticence. Here she joins other great screwball heroines who recognize that they must fabricate roles to get the benighted screwball hero to understand that they belong together. Their zany alter egos work with their

"conventional" personalities to bring the man to this knowledge: Irene Dunne's Lucy/"Lola" Warriner in *The Awful Truth*, Katharine Hepburn's Susan/"Swinging Door Susie" Vance in *Bringing Up Baby*, and Barbara Stanwyck's Jean Harrington/"Lady Eve Sedgwick" in *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941).

This split not only permits these women to be demure even as they are sexually aggressive, but also sets up for what Haskell says is a larger equilibrium between men and women in heterosexual love based on the problems between them being roughly equal.⁶⁵ Thus the energy women must exert to bring men to consciousness compares with the work men must do to accept this knowledge. Due to male sexual "authority," a dominant or at least rambunctious female is needed to rectify this balance. Often Amanda will not be responsible for the upset she causes Flagg and others (namely, smashing plate glass using a cop's billy club, deriding the sponsor of her radio show while on the air, trying to shoot Flagg). Indeed, it is his ignorance and carelessness that are to blame. (Of course, her being sedated or in a trance is another mechanism permitting Amanda to get away with expressing her intimate desire.) But twice while in a fully lucid condition, she entertains roles (or demonstrates aspects of herself) to keep his attention

fixed on her so that he might fall in love. Though Amanda does not succeed either time, the first instance happens when she invents a delirious dream to have her remain his patient (the appliquéd arrows all pointing to the appliquéd heart on her dress should have told him the real story), and the second instance is "The Yam" itself.

To the degree that Amanda tries to make the content of "I Used to Be Color Blind" come true in real life, Flagg goes in the reverse direction by his disavowal of dance.

Early on, though, it is his performance in the golf solo that reveals how radically misguided his decision or direction is. Formally titled "Since They Turned 'Loch Lomond' into Swing," the number allows him to demonstrate a versatility that blends music with dance, one type of dance with another, and finally, dance steps with golf swings in rhythm with the music. Though gimmicky, it is hugely effective in displaying Flagg's latent coordination. But instead of a distant perfection (it stands as one of Astaire's virtuosic pieces), it is the sense of merriment he exudes that contributes enormously to its appeal.

Under the critical gaze of Amanda who ridicules Flagg for his bad golf strokes ("Whatever happened to that 'theory of coordination' you were so hot about?"), he

meets her challenge by beginning the solo with the same activity he performed in the film's first shot of him: playing a harmonica. In homage to golf's national origin (and also to the golf pro with him), he plays a Scottish-sounding note (four times) before switching to a lively swing arrangement. This makes him want to move his feet, and thus almost immediately he combines music and dance. (Astaire's matching two-tone gloves and wing-tip shoes both link and draw attention to these areas of his body.) But as his music alternates between Celtic Highlander and popular jazzy swing, his dance movements reflect both musical inspirations. In this way, he goes from the balls of his feet in the Scottish manner to using his toes and heels for tap dancing à la swing. Next, to fashion a sword dance he takes a pair of golf clubs and crosses them (St. Andrew's style) on the grass. Having discarded his harmonica, he then substitutes a traditional rendition of the sword dance with a pure and confident "No Strings"-like gaiety (as when he performs a "delicate leg-shake-while-fluttering-flaps-of-sweater step"⁶⁶). Kicking one golf club aside before he uses his feet to cantilever the other into his hand, there is a cut to him at a special launch area that shows him dancing while he tees off. This special launch area, one never found in golf and built for use in this number, permits Flagg to tap and tee at the same

time because it occurs on a hardwood deck that nevertheless blends with the surrounding grass. This solid surface allows him to tap his feet and golf iron in full rhythm with the music as he swings (in each sense of the word). Photographed in a deep focus shot, the fairway provides a solid background that brings Flagg's movements into relief just as the medium and long shots of him in front of the stone wall had served this purpose before now in the solo. After an amusing tease (kicking aside rather than swinging at a row of balls), he drives five of them straight down the long fairway in a second deep focus shot from a usual (grassy) launch. Flagg achieves not only perfect golf form-- the balls can be seen landing within feet of each other --but does so while maintaining his musical timing by swatting the balls in sync with the rhythm.

Sparkling and rather catty, Amanda's Aunt Cora (Luella Gear) says in a characteristic piquant tone, "I imagine women find Dr. Flagg very charming-- especially girls."

Except for his performance in the golf solo (which she does not witness), her remarks about his appeal are not deserved unless she has a preference for analysts. By this specialty number permitting him to demonstrate his latent coordination through dance it allows him to show, in other words, a graceful skill-as-skill. This bolsters

his virility-- a quality reinforced by his incorporation of sport into dance. In this way, his graceful skill-as-skill imparts a solid masculinity in contrast to the hulky but sexless Connors (his falsetto act as woman's column editor "Miss Setsumi Naguchi of the Honolulu Daily Bugle" is a hilarious highlight), the sterile Judge Joe Travers (Clarence Kolb) to whom Aunt Cora will decline his offer to dance saying, "Joe, you know I don't dance at your age," or, with gentle memories of Blore, Horton, and Rhodes, Franklin Pangborn's faint-prone score announcer. In addition, though, it imbues him with a charm lacking in the boring Arden. In this way, the golf solo is the only place in the movie where Flagg possesses the charm that Travers had because it is the only place where he has the Top Hat character's three-fold archetypal qualities (ontological equality, infinite mind leading to graceful skill, and thorough self-containedness).

Only at the eleventh hour does Flagg realize his love for Amanda, but not before bungling the situation to the fullest extent. The suggestion he implants in her through hypnosis that she shoot him down ("like a dog") takes their pursued/pursuer roles to the lethal extreme.

In this way, the passion she had devoted to love him is now directed towards killing him. (Indeed when she

chases him around the country club with a shotgun, it seems fitting that it is Rogers herself who first represents so graphically the male chorus' revenge.) To win her back (deprogramme her), he reverses his inactive position and aggressively pursues her. He employs song and dance for this end, and the result is "Change Partners." However he has made such a mess that, unthinkable for the situation in *Top Hat*, not even the charm of Astaire's singing and dancing can remedy his screwball predicament with Rogers. In addition to being interrupted by Arden before being able to reach her subconscious brain, the fact that he is not permitted a fluid transfer from song to dance (a narrative interval divides the two expressive forms into separate sections) shows his lack of power.

Beautifully and jealously in the singing portion of the number he puts across his feelings for her ("Must you dance quite so close with your lips touching his face?/Can't you see I'm longing to be in his place?"), and then pleads "Won't you change partners and dance with me?" But it is to no avail. In the dance portion of the number he not only combines hypnosis with dance (his hands commanding her movements), but blends signature elements of their former dances in the film as if to reach her. More overt than in any of their dances

together in the whole series, Rogers is shown as totally manipulated by Astaire. Pulling invisible strings, he controls her every move (like having her spin around him and then "freezing" her position to admire her or making her fall backward to dip her). Still, when he reproduces the signature elements of their former dances and their power gets through to her, he stops short of fully completing them. These include when she holds her arms up vaguely in "The Yam" style and he lowers them, as well as when the film cuts to a medium shot and they move in position to kiss as they dance only to have him draw back. These reluctances seem to suggest that though he is in control, he is uncomfortable with being the pursuer. Ironically, just when he moves to assume his full role as the aggressor, namely, by using the film's dance motif-- the lift -- at the close of the number to spirit her away and snap her back into reality, he is soon stopped.

Haskell writes that sometimes a performer or director will "throw such magic dust" that the spectator may only faintly perceive the "moral inconsistencies or cruelties of the plot."⁶⁷ This is true of the Astaire and Rogers relationship in *Top Hat*, but it is also descriptive of them in *Carefree*. In the earlier film, the "magic dust"-- or sham --was Jerry's charm that seemed to make

Dale more herself even as he consumed her identity. In a parallel way the sham in the latter film likewise ends up with Amanda equating deliverance with diminution, but the means are utterly different. Instead of Astaire character's charm (which exists only long enough to show how self-deluded he is), it is the crafty, underhanded manner in which the movie uses the potentially progressive syntax of screwball comedy for its conservative romantic musical comedy ends that forms its "magic dust." Tellingly it is not Amanda's scenes of mayhem that help to make Tony conscious of his feelings, but a scene where she compliantly agrees to be hypnotized and fall out of love with him. (Compare her tearful expression with the close-up of her in *Top Hat* when she agrees to marry the Rhodes character.) But her idea of love is not one of equality with him in which she retains her separateness. As already stated, when she falls in love with him her sassiness and bite vanish. However, it is the disturbing closing shot of Amanda as she marches down the wedding aisle with a happy grin and black eye to marry Tony that encapsulates the undisguised truth of their relationship. The sham that *Carefree* puts out is greater and more insulting towards Rogers's character than in *Top Hat* because her attraction to Astaire's character is especially unearned. He is allowed to dominate even though he

fails at nearly everything (at least she succeeds in her one objective -- to marry him). In this way, that aspect between analyst and client existing between Tony and Amanda is not her progression toward a supposed individuality that is self-contained (as he is shown not to have except for the golf solo)-- much less perhaps any individuality. Instead, her idea is to remain beneath him (under his "care"). Just as the sham of Jerry's charm in *Top Hat* moved Dale from resistance to full surrender, the sham arising from the negotiations between both comedy genres in *Carefree* has Amanda literally "calling the shots" only to embrace submission.

Part II

The Sky's the Limit: Dancing on a Ledge

A very sketchy story; and the figure of the hesitant hero a very sketchy one: vague restlessness, vague doubts about himself resolved in the flurried happy ending without ever having been particularized. For one in the audience this story easily reduces itself to the story of a young charmer who has tended to think himself incurably the wolf--until the strength of this new love ends such thoughts.

Barbara Deming, *Running Away from Myself: A Dream: Portrait of America Drawn from the Films of the 40's*

The way Astaire was constructed in *Carefree* was due to economics rather than to social attitudes regarding rugged individualism-- changes that Americans would only entertain starting with their late involvement in the war three years later. The box office returns from Astaire and Rogers' previous movie (*Shall We Dance*), though high, were not as profitable as *Top Hat* (RKO's biggest moneymaker of the decade) or *Swing Time*. Additionally, when Fred and Ginger separated for a short time to work on other projects (him to stay in musicals and her to widen her acting with dramatic roles), the strong success of her *Stage Door* (Gregory La Cava, 1937) over the disappointment of his *A Damsel in Distress* (Stevens, 1937), meant a larger part for her and a change of formula in their next film. Still, writes Croce, *Carefree* already has the look of the Forties and she cites the "muted luxury of the settings" and Rogers's clothes as examples.⁶⁸ Furthermore Astaire no longer physically appears frozen in time. (At age 36 in *Top Hat* he does not look a day older than what he seems in photos of him when he co-starred with his sister Adele on Broadway in *Lady Be Good* [1924] and *Funny Face* [1927]).⁶⁹ Beginning with *Carefree* he appears more middle-aged than boyish (or more exactly, less a lighthearted androgyne and more a slightly nervous hollow man), and this is another anticipation of the way

the movie points to his World War II era musicals.

With Astaire as a Flying Tiger and Joan Leslie as an aspiring war photographer, none of his six films from 1941-46 place the war so prominently in the plot as *The Sky's the Limit*. Even the movie's production values (starting with a twinkling title sequence that is flat and lacklustre) suggest the effects of wartime rationing. There are several instances in the plot itself (some astonishing) where the film tries to convey a realistic portrait of the war (both at home and in battle) that I will later mention. Finally, casting Leslie as Astaire's dance partner also emphasizes the war since she was cast as the girl-next-door type in flag-waver films (Hawks's *Sergeant York* [1941], and Michael Curtiz's *Yankee Doodle Dandy* [1942] and *This is the Army* [1943]). At the same time, *The Sky's the Limit* clearly signals (in a way no other film does from this period) that Astaire is simultaneously to be understood both in terms of the particular character he plays and his larger star persona. During its first 36 minutes, the movie throws out a few in-jokes regarding Astaire that permit him to say things that are appropriate to his character yet acquire an added (comic) meaning if interpreted as coming from Astaire the actor. (The movie does the same to a lesser extent with Leslie and Robert

Benchley-- the latter in its allusion to his "The Sex Life of a Polyp" routine.)

Examples include when he gets her attention by placing himself in a photo of celebrities she has snapped and asks to be listed in her tabloid's society page as "and friend"-- as in "Ginger Rogers and friend"; when he asks during their first musical number, "Where's Hayworth?" in reference to the films he had made with the war era sex goddess (in the lyric before Leslie had enjoyed her own self referential moment about a previous role when she asked, "Where's Cagney?"); and, most of all, when it is learned that the names of the characters Astaire and Leslie play are Fred and Joan. All of the in-jokes stop (except for the names of their characters) once the film has successfully set up this dual pattern of considering Astaire. For the remainder of the movie, everything that happens to his character will also be felt as directed towards his larger star persona.

Strategically the reflexive nature of Astaire's construction ends just before the embarrassing snake dance he is forced to perform. Rather than providing an extensive analysis of the film, I will concentrate on those areas of *The Sky's the Limit* that undermine Astaire (his movie character interchangeable with, and therefore half standing for, his star persona).

Specifically, I will look at the way the film continues the process set in motion in *Carefree* of thwarting his rugged individualism. In two scenes-- significantly they are numbers --Astaire suffers an acute breakdown because of trying to preserve his rugged individualism.

Both the snake dance and "One for My Baby" are solo numbers, and if the first one is painful in showing the remarkable lengths to which he will go to safeguard his rugged individualism, the second one shows a profound identity crisis at the base of his mythic independence.

The Sky's the Limit seems a slight forerunner to a number of Hollywood movies that appeared immediately after the war featuring a roaming male and the female who "saves" him through her love, thus bringing him "home." Without a belief in a sense of place, the man is a "rolling stone" (geographically as well as psychologically and usually sexually-- a "wolf"), who, in the heterosexual conventions of Hollywood, eventually lands in the "heroine's arms (where life begins)." Examining a half-dozen films of this type, Barbara Deming finds that beneath the surface problem of the male-- alcoholism in *The Lost Weekend* (Billy Wilder, 1945), a murder rap in *Spellbound* (Hitchcock, 1945), and war injury in *Pride of the Marines* (Delmer Daves, 1945), to offer three examples --a general unease inhabits him.

She observes the romantic pattern in the central heterosexual couple and sees that it begins with the solid yet ordinary woman rebuffing the romancy or uncertain advances of the dislocated yet attractive man. Just as he starts to discover his unexpected depth of feeling for her, something stops him from being able to love her. From this point it is the woman's turn to be the aggressor in love, but it is not a matter of making herself enticing towards him but of saving him from "the terror of himself." Deming calls such heroines Ariadne figures in reference to the Cretan princess in ancient Greek lore who guided Theseus out of the Minotaur's labyrinth, and aided him to slay the monster.

One could argue that the first part of this is a familiar trope, only set in heterosexual terms, signifying a wider tension spanning the history of much of US culture, namely, between those whom Wallace Stegner regards as "dreamers of Walden Pond" (placed persons) versus those "cousin not to Thoreau but to Daniel Boone" (migratory individuals). However the experience of the war, as reflected in Deming's survey of movies, seems to have brought this tension into relief during the immediate postwar era with men and women representing the placedness/displacedness split. In analysing both Astaire solos, I want to frame my

discussion of them within Deming's outline.⁷⁰

Up to the snake dance, and for much time beyond it, *The Sky's the Limit* encapsulates the pattern of heterosexual coupling described by Deming. It establishes the restless free-spirited autonomy of the Astaire character (Fred Atwill) at the beginning when he cuts out on a personal appearance tour to devote himself to fun on the 10 day leave. Chiding a fellow flyer for not abandoning the tour to join him, he explicitly links such independence with manliness ("Why don't you be a man and get off [the tour train]?"). At the same time, he makes it clear that the fun he wants to be free for is sex (a desire conveyed to the Southern woman beside him during a parade). His status as a sex pro is later viewed when he gives advice to the Benchley character ("All you do is put in your bid. No finesse. You just buck the line. No lateral passes."), and in the previous scene, when he expertly aids a secretary who has a run in her stocking.

But once he sees Joan Manyon (Leslie), he decides to spend the rest of his leave following her. To succeed with Joan where he failed with the Southern woman, he decides not to disclose his identity as a Flying Tiger (a decision reinforced by learning that her ambition is to be a war photographer overseas). Though he goes

after-- or rather stalks --her everywhere and will not leave her alone (renting an apartment in her building, interrupting her at work), Atwill-- now calling himself Burton --wants to keep their odd, budding relationship light and superficial. Early on, for example, he parodies a song of romantic yearning ("My Shining Hour") she had crooned. "That's not a bad song you sang tonight. But like you it takes itself a little too seriously," he lectures her. From:

This will be my shining hour,
Calm and happy and bright
In my dreams, your face will flower,
Through the darkness of the night.

Like the lights of home before me,
Or an angel watching o'ver me,

This will be my shining hour,
Till I'm with you again.

he changes the lyrics to reflect his playful, trivial disposition ("Like the face of Mischa Auer/On the music hall marquee"). Thus by the end of the song he has shifted its meaning from romance to a melody that suggests the singer has had too much alcohol ("Were they stingers or Bacardi's?"). Supplying a rhyme, Joan even gets pulled into his jokey outlook ("Was it Tony's?/Was it Sardi's?"). Though his rendering of the song is not

romancy, it still reveals Astaire taking what is Romantic and transmuting it into something that, as I described "No Strings," is so light and breezy that it keeps his heterosexual self-containedness from being disturbed or challenged.

The snake dance not only does both, but also shows how vulnerable his rugged individualism is. Before this "terrible moment" (to borrow from the Mast quote that opened this chapter) the film had used another crucial aspect of Astaire's persona against him: his sense of fashion style. This was seen in the manner the film encodes him with clothes that mark him as a wrangler in his first meeting with Joan ("a dude ranch outfit": stetson, boots, checked bow tie, ranch-style blazer), while revealing that such attire is clownish and conspicuously out of place. "Kinda got yourself all dressed up, ain't ya?," observes the costumed club doorman with a kidding laugh. Instead of the film delivering a gentle attack on Astaire and his singular elegance in fashion (due to him shedding his common military uniform for the features of a cowboy's rugged individualism), it ridicules him when he enters the club to chase Joan. For as he goes in, the camera suddenly cuts to a long shot of him with his pant legs tucked in his boots that makes him walk awkwardly rather than with

his usual grace. And because cowgirls traditionally wear their pants in this way, it undercuts the link between manliness and independence he had made while ditching his squadron buddy.

This, though, is little compared to how the film uses dance itself to embarrass Astaire. The snake dance, despite it lasting less than 70 seconds, is a solo of unexpected violence instigated with sadistic pleasure by the airman he had taunted at the start. During that scene Astaire had looked up at his fellow Flying Tiger standing on the end car and challenged his autonomy/virility. Now in the canteen, their positions are physically and psychologically reversed so it is his squadron buddy who looks up from his chair below as Astaire is made to seem weak (subordinate/unmanly) on the table above. To facilitate the scene's cruelty, the part of Fenton (the squadron buddy) is played by no less than Robert Ryan, a performer with a star persona that renders him, as Thomson says, "a truly frightening man."

But the specific aspect that makes Ryan so frightening, notes Thomson, is not so much the sense of external menace he projected. Rather it comes across in what he seems to be thinking about, thereby making his eyes--not his fists --the focal area which imparts his brutality: "If some people grind their teeth, Ryan was

an eye-grinder."⁷¹ Though the role was early in his career, Ryan's performance in this scene is a classic instance of his star persona. With a tormentor's smile and glistening eyes, he forces Astaire to hop up on the table and dance under the threat of telling Joan the true identity of her pursuer. "Up, up, up," he demands snapping his fingers, and then repeats his command. At first, Fred had not wanted to believe him and becomes increasingly uncomfortable (nervously turning his face away, folding his arms, and his body growing more hunched as he sits at one corner of the table). As "Cuban Sugar Mill" wafts onto the soundtrack, he climbs on the table ("Hey, it's dangerous up here!") and makes himself look foolish to the satisfaction of Ryan's character.

His combination of "dreadful snaky arm and ass motions"⁷² attract not only her attention but a crowd. To stress his embarrassment, the camera shoots Astaire from a variety of ranges (medium, long) and tilts/angles/points-of-view (for example, him looking down at Ryan, Joan's open-mouthed reaction at seeing him, the heated look of the MP). There are no shots from Ryan's perspective towards him, but the dance is full of two-shots of them as if to reiterate the sadism being played out. (Is some part of the discomfort felt

in the arrangement between them related to sexual positions and male heterosexual anxiety, namely, the idea of power and control being physically commanded from a bottom, rather than a top, position?) And lastly there is a sense that Astaire's debasement is meant to fill the screen. Such a feeling is transmitted in the long shots placing him on the frame's right half before Leslie sees Astaire; after she spots him, of course, the point-of-view reverses and he is on the left half. However when the MP sees him and then halts his dance, Astaire is squarely in centre frame.

There was always a flimsy or bogus side to Fred's decision not to make his identity known to Joan, since he could well exploit his status as a war hero as a sexual selling point. However, his humiliating performance during the solo-- one producing an effect opposite to any response he would have gotten had his war heroism been known --is the first evidence that more is going on with him going incognito than it simply being a ruse to have a fling. Not coincidentally, at least according to Deming's outline, the snake dance occurs directly following his first genuine, earned success with her (the "A Lot in Common with You" routine). True to form, as soon as he begins to impress her and she starts to welcome him (she will allow him to

kiss her later that evening), the signs of his "vague restlessness, vague doubts" manifest themselves (he will surprise and slightly disappoint her by not kissing her puckered lips). In "A Lot in Common with You" he had not only broken her resistance, but had won her over by creating a situation which permitted them to exhibit, through song and dance, a happy harmony between them. Ignoring him at first, she had directed her singing to the crowd. Unexpectedly for her, he had joined her singing even as he set up an entertaining counterpoint whose purpose was to reveal how much the two share. Most important, though, the number had shown them as compatible partners (performing well together) who find humour and fun as a couple. With the snake dance coming after "A Lot in Common with You," she undertakes the salvific Ariadne role with her characteristic spunk and determination (coordinating job interviews for him, and even proposing marriage). However as she becomes more aggressive, he becomes more uncertain. Finding that he has unintentionally fallen in love, he offers to help her boss and hapless admirer Phil Harriman (Benchley) marry Joan. He also undermines the employment prospects she has arranged. Finally in a radical and refreshing departure from Deming's Ariadne figures, she responds by dumping him.

His chaotic reaction is the "One for My Baby" number. Yet before concluding this chapter with an analysis of this celebrated solo, I want to return to the idea of sham. In looking at it in regard to the construction of gender roles in heterosexuality, *Top Hat's* sham (the mechanism of Astaire's charm) and that of *Carefree* (its deployment of screwball comedy) had Rogers cede her sassiness and bite-- qualities reflecting her individual identity --to Astaire. What distinguishes *The Sky's the Limit*, despite it generally being an inferior work compared to the other musicals, is its integrity towards maintaining the personhood of Leslie. She is never asked to cede her spunk and determination, and in her musical sequences with Astaire ("A Lot in Common with You" and the dance version of "My Shining Hour") she enjoys an equality with him similar to the type of early number in the Astaire-Rogers series in which Rogers was evenly matched with Astaire ("Isn't This a Lovely Day?"). In their first duet, for example, this is suggested by all the side by-side movements between them as well as by the mutual spins and barrel jumps; in their second duet, this is implied in all of the variations of mirroring that fill the dance.

Additionally, there is an equality of voice in both numbers as both sing in the first one and neither sings

in the second. Yet despite all this, there was the possibility that Leslie and the film would fall victim to another form of sham in relation to heterosexuality: one myth or "dream" (Deming's phrase) of romantic love--that is, the deluded idea of one person "saving" another. For though Deming successfully identifies an important pattern within a wide variety of postwar films having to do with the loving woman rescuing the haunted man, she reduces the Ariadne account to the level of moniker rather than getting at its deep archetypal significance. What gives the story its emotional resonance is not that Ariadne rescues Theseus and then "they live happily ever after." As a great tragic tale, she does save him but in doing so a double betrayal results: she betrays her country and brings about the end of her civilization, followed by him abandoning her.

The message of the Ariadne story is that the salvific figure ends up the loser. (One could add that there is another betrayal that precedes the others: that of betraying one's self with the illusion of rescuing another person.)

The Sky's the Limit refuses to endorse this myth of romantic love otherwise seen in many American films. It exudes not only a kind of realism concerning romantic love but also about other matters, including the war.

In an unusually bold manner, instances of the latter include conversations Fred has with a hypocritical patriot and a lengthy one with a rich aircraft manufacturer making unsafe fighter planes. Strange for an Astaire musical, the film appears to elevate ordinariness or the undistinguished. This is seen not only in the plot (like the kind of man Leslie is looking for ["A Creature not too bright or good /For human nature's daily food."]), but in the movie's production values or quality (the tepid vocal rendition of "My Shining Hour" and the pleasant but pedestrian numbers between Fred and Joan, to name only two). This does not excuse the film's flaws (few worse than Benchley's interminable "comic" monologue) or turn them into assets, but its integrity makes it more sympathetic. (Trying to pass off the 26-year age difference between Astaire and Leslie is where it comes closest to pulling sham).

In her study of Astaire's drunk dances, Sally Banes describes his performance in "One for My Baby" as "a tour de force of nihilism" that stems from his rejection from Leslie.⁷³ She writes that in each of his drunk dances (the New Year's Eve duet in *Holiday Inn*, the aforementioned "Heat Wave" in *Blue Skies*, and this one--all numbers, of course, that come from his wartime era

musicals), his character gets inebriated due to romantic loss. In examining the climactic moments of each of the Astaire films analysed-- "Cheek to Cheek" in *Top Hat*, the instrumental (dance) version of "Change Partners" in *Carefree*, and this number in *The Sky's the Limit* -- there is a devolution of his power and control. Thus, there is a movement from Astaire consuming his partner to being unable to do so to being partnerless and consuming himself. Yet the reason he gets drunk in the last film is more complicated than losing Joan. As the full title of the number indicates-- "One for My Baby (and One More for the Road)" --the crisis behind him getting drunk has to do with the placedness ("Baby") and displacedness ("the Road") split within. Claustrophobic anxiety envelops him by the idea of settling down to wed and get a stable job. Helpless and hopeless he tries to explain to her why he has undermined her plans:

I tried. I thought it might work out. . .all of a sudden the whole thing just closed in on me. I just couldn't go through with it. . . .It's just that I'm not cut out for that kind of life, don't you see? I'm used to wandering about all over the place. Well, I don't know, I guess it's that I haven't got any character or something.

In the snake dance the threat had been external, but in this solo the tension derives from conflicting internal forces. After Fred is left to drown his sorrows at Harriman's own favourite watering hole, he spends the night drifting amongst the places significant in his relationship with Joan. In going from place to place (all of them are bars), his shame and confusion progress into despair and frustration. At first he tries to pass off his pain nonchalantly, but his desperate need to talk about his misery ("I've feelin' so bad/I wish you'd make the music dreamy and sad.") and his insistent demand for a friendly ear ("And when I'm gloomy/You simply got to listen to me/Until it's talked away.") belie his casual air. Yet because each bartender walks away from him, he is forced to dance his suffering. Just as accidentally breaking a glass had signalled his singing, it also propels him to dance after he has sung the B strain of the -A-A/B/A song. (In contrast to his singing which spans across the bars, his dancing takes place in one place-- the site where he first met Joan.)

But instead of being subdued the second time he inadvertently breaks his glass, Astaire reacts by angrily hurling its remains. His own ferocious response startles him, making him flee from the counter. Suddenly remembering why he flung the bits of glass, his frustration returns, and, in a quick-tempered, "go-to-

hell" manner, he delivers a short burst of tap as he slams down his hat. His torrent of rage dazes him, as he then staggers aimlessly for a few steps until stopping in front of a pillar and wearily collapses against it. As he stares out to the spot where he saw her sing "My Shining Hour," a few bars from it are played.

This brings him back to life and he dances as if Joan were in his arms. The music on the soundtrack goes back to "One for My Baby" and now it is his reverie that is shattered. Whether inspired by the memory of her or the need to forget her (or both), he springs up to the bar counter top. There in a frenzy of tap, he prances, twirls, and slides from one end of the long surface to the other. Jumping down, he continues his hoofing and at this point it turns wild and cathartic as he demolishes a single glass with a pair of well-honed kicks. For the first time he intentionally destroys a glass, and as Banes notes, there is a movement in the number from mutiny to agility in terms of control of his body.⁷⁴ Why Astaire delights in this act of destruction is unclear. Is it to reclaim a sense of power and control? Is it an exercise in nihilism (him revelling in his self-destruction) as Banes declares? Whatever the reason(s), it whets his appetite. Looking around to

see if he can continue, he leaps back onto the counter.

There the tempo of the music picks up making him tap both harder and faster than before. Bounding across to a mirrored alcove behind the counter, he finds his movements circumscribed by displays of carefully stacked glasses. Dancing within this small space increases his wild agitation, and the desire to wreak havoc on the stacked glasses and wall mirrors makes him delirious.

Before springing to the floor he lays waste to two glass arrangements. The solo climaxes when he sends a bar stool crashing into the largest display and the mirror behind it. With this, he suddenly appears spent and staggers on top of a chair. When the manager rushes in, Astaire hands him a wad of greenbacks singing, "Don't let it be said that little Freddy can't carry his load."

Like so much in this number, what he croons here suggests a few possible interpretations: ranging from a literal "I-can-pay-for-the-messes-I-make" reading to a general affirmation of his power and control to a wider allusion about his star persona.

The Sky's the Limit ends on a similar note of ambiguity. The two stars are reunited in the last frame, but it is unclear as to why Fred has had a change of heart about Joan. Where and how was his inner split worked out? Is his "transformation" brief or lasting? Will he, in

fact, live to return home? Cohan writes that Astaire offered an alternative masculinity during the Forties and Fifties to the one presented in film noir, and therefore a different view of heterosexuality. Arguing that Astaire's numbers show the male body as a site of joy and plenitude, Cohen holds that the famous singer-dancer is constructed opposite to "the castrated vet or rogue detective of noir dramas."⁷⁵ Just as I argued in the last chapter that Astaire's archetypal persona shares more with, rather than stands apart from, a noir detective like Sam Spade or Mike Hammer, I think that many numbers from his wartime era musicals (like the snake dance and "One for My Baby") convey lack or absence. Moreover the view of heterosexuality in *The Sky's the Limit* communicates as much tension, anxiety, and confusion in male-female relationships (though without the physical violence) as in many a noir film. Importantly, however, the movie does show equality between the central heterosexual couple. But rather than it coming at the expense of Astaire's partner, it is exclusively at his cost. Now the question is: Is it possible for Astaire to be charming yet allow his romantic partner to preserve her separateness?

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Section 2

MINNELLI

Chapter 4

Meet Me in St. Louis: The Challenge of Difference

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine how social harmony is at once the task and goal propelling the actions of the Smith family in *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Yet as the film reveals, this endeavour is one that involves anxiety and turmoil. The biggest challenge facing the Smiths is not the threat of moving to New York City, but the temptation to relinquish their collective dream of staying together as a family. Importantly, what most spectators carry away after watching this 1944 film is its pervasive atmosphere of warmth and affection. The main reason it elicits this response has to do with the characters' disposition toward accommodating one another's needs. This inclination toward loving compatibility is seen as the Smiths placing the good of each other or that of the larger family before their own. The film greatly complicates the means by which this ideal is maintained by situating the aim of harmonious relations within a view of family life premised on the notion of discrete gender difference. Thus *Meet Me in St. Louis* is about resolving the tensions of what is popularly upheld as the wellspring of culture: the "traditional" or nuclear family.

In *Meet Me in St. Louis* there exists a concordant match of form and content, wherein the latter finds perfect expression in the former and vice versa. On this point, one can trace critical recognition of this distinctive quality of Minnelli's acclaimed style at least as far back as the early Sixties in *Movie*,⁷⁶ and Thomas Elsaesser's landmark 1969 essay. Though each textual component can be delineated, all elements-- style, number and narrative, characterization, and theme --are seamless in this film. The harmony that the Smiths endeavour to realize arises out of a film that itself is artistically a paragon of synthetic relations. Since this is such an essential aspect of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, scholars have delved into the manner its structural arrangement is expressive of its theme (for example, its circular compositions and motifs). At the same time nothing yet has been written about what I hold to be its most crucial pattern. What I will be looking at is the film's overall trajectory, that is, the way in which all its narrative and filmic elements move toward a balance or equilibrium. It achieves this by constantly erecting explicit contrasts in the areas of plot, theme, and most of all, gender representation.

Conflicts in *Meet Me in St. Louis* emanate from a single abiding dichotomy: the structural antagonism dividing

men and women. This clash is regarded as self-evident, but as Minnelli's musical makes plain, this "inherent" discord derives from the manner both genders are defined. Males and females are drawn along sharply contrasting lines. Antipodal roles and domains govern the way in which they are depicted so that each gender is seen possessing its own unique socio-economic abilities, duties, and spheres. The heterosexual model here is one of men having characteristics that complement women, and women housing traits that round-off men. However all these gender-associated points/counterpoint and shifts/countershifts fuse with the movie's "musicality" or harmonic structure. Tracing how this pattern is textually constructed and the way in which it comes to effect a series of conciliations is the heart of my analysis.

In *Meet Me in St. Louis*, then, a domestic and cultural division of gender is shown to produce neatly defined personalities and social relations. Crucially though, the film makes it clear that this very separateness sets up a situation in which the thought processes and activity of one gender are all too often seen as unknowable to the other. Hence on the one hand, the Smith males and females enjoy a security that comes from tightly arranged social constructions of heterosexual

gender identity; on the other hand, this orchestration renders both groups foreigners to the other and complications necessarily ensue. So while this particular model of heterosexuality produces a logically elegant symmetry, a world of closure and orderliness, its stringent design also effects tensions and crises. Nevertheless just as constant effort and attention--struggle --are a vital part of the dynamics between these two groups, so too are the affection and humour that transpire as they attend to their differences in a posture of love and care. Hence it is shown that complementary relationships contain the seeds of wholeness and balance even as they possess those of discord and estrangement.

Scholars have been divided over the politics of *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Some see it as a subversive movie which manifests "the swirling contradictions" found within capitalism and patriarchal heterosexuality. Others regard it as epitomizing MGM mogul Louis B. Mayer's Republican Party "family values." While I think each of these interpretations elucidates certain aspects of the film, each one is nevertheless limited and incomplete. I feel this is so because regardless of which of these views is being presented, key parts of the movie are downplayed, or even passed over, in order to advance a

particular approach. An avant-gardist reading would likely gloss over or trivalize the film's warmth, while a conservative one would probably pay little or no attention to its genuinely darker moments. I will move away from focusing on a single ideological slant, examining instead its richer and larger fertile syntheses.

Having the film's characters possess expanding qualities like love even as they reside within narrow gender constructions, makes it necessary to analyse two critical areas of Minnelli's movie. Dividing my study into two sections, Part I will concern the disparate roles and spaces drawn for its male and female figures.

By looking closely at two major scenes in the film where breakdown occurs, I will trace and explore those dynamics in which familial harmony is impeded. Toward this end, I will analyse the maturation process in men and the position Mr. Smith has within the family. In Part II, I will investigate the same development in the Smith females with a special emphasis on the characters of Esther and Tootie. Following that, I will locate and examine those counter forces whereby the genders are able to come together in a harmonious fashion. For this, I will delve into the function of the songs and explore the ways the numbers underscore or delineate the

movie's thematic concerns, as well as aid in Esther's individuation process.

Part I

The Agony of Difference

In *Meet Me in St. Louis* males and females are identified with separate realms. Its men are associated with nondomestic regions such as the office (Mr. Smith), university (Warren Sheffield and later Lon, Jr.), and sports (John Truett). In contrast, its women are affiliated with household chores and affairs. (Complicating matters somewhat is that Grandpa, the oldest Smith male, and Tootie and Agnes, the youngest Smith females, appear at ease in both spheres. This is because they are seen housing far less rigid gender identities. Their remarkable fluidity, in terms of character construction and agency, will be covered at different points in Part II.) Notably the film's narrative universe is set wholly within the feminine domain. Never shown is Mr. Smith's work as a lawyer at the office or in court, Warren's student life at Yale or John's time at basketball practice, and these absences effect a distancing quality which renders the men as Other. Given that the film equates the personhood of women with domestic space, it is little wonder that the action circulates almost entirely near or on the grounds

of the Smith house.

Because men are thus constructed in relation to such things as employment, study, and sports, their perspective is shown to be sensitive to career opportunity and money matters. In contradistinction, due to their depiction in connection with home life, women are shown to be highly attuned to familial arrangements. The men are responsible, as Serafina Bathrick writes, for productive labour (economic providers), while the women are entrusted with the business of relationships (maintenance work).⁷⁷ One gender, then, neatly "completes" the other. Within this complementary form of heterosexuality, it falls upon women to be the bridge-builders who keep the interaction amongst the family members operating smoothly. This is represented as their primary function, and significantly the film delves into the ways in which the women, rather than the men, achieve success. But as is true with many aspects of its portrait of heterosexual life, the film avoids a simplistic treatment of what is usually, though erroneously, seen as the "traditional" American family.⁷⁸

Instead, one of its many nuances is the conclusion that women and men are entrusted with nurturing the emotional health and welfare of the family.

Within this model two impediments counter the goal of compatibly loving relations. The first one involves the situation of males and females not discovering a shared space that allows them to connect, and the second is not creating a clear means of relating even if common ground is found. The challenge is a delicate one: crafting a position that enables both genders to retain their distinct identities and attendant spheres without rendering either side inimical to the other. After a way of relating is forged that honours their differences while recognizing their affinities, the next task becomes one of coordinating the most efficacious system of communication. Instead of creating a way where men and women come together (the aim of any heterosexual model), failure to overcome either of these obstacles runs the risk of making misunderstanding and confusion the condition of personal and social relations between men and women. *Meet Me in St. Louis* shows that the collective efforts of the Smiths are needed to overcome these dual threats and, that time and again, it is these obstacles which jeopardize their harmony.

For these reasons, the very gender assumptions that form this model potentially may be the same points that undermine it. In this Jane Austen model, therefore, any occasion where men and women interact becomes an

opportunity for dissonance despite that convergence is inherent in its very form. In the film this is true whether such encounters are actual collisions (like when Mr. Smith refuses to depart from his regularly scheduled mealtime), or instances of searching love (as when Esther asks John to help her turn off the indoor lights). Disruptive or congenial, the twin challenges to gender harmony occur at exactly those moments when men or women come into contact with the other. Yet the film's male characters are always seen making an additional sojourn, one that is geographical. Such is the situation, for the film only depicts men in and around the home and never, as mentioned, in their appointed habitats. Because the film is framed from the women's perspective, showing its male characters outside their own space underlines both their alien status and awkwardness and augments the spectator's already close identification with the females. Of course, the paradox of this model is that the home--the women's space --is also in a very real sense the men's space, due to it being the centre of the family.

When men come into contact with women their actions are generally distinguished by a lumbering gracelessness (Mr. Smith's stubborn attitude, John's callow romanticism, Warren's oafish attempts at communication).

Their maladroitness is taken to signal a lack of familiarity with women and the whole arena of things "feminine." But instead of being rewarded for successfully fulfilling social expectations concerning men and masculinity, their very lack of emotional intelligence, on the contrary, often leaves the women feeling disappointed and hurt. Males are in a no-win position, for the traits they were instructed to expel in their formation (nurturing, sensitivity) are the ones they are later expected to acquire. Therefore to the extent the movie looks at the male characters what is actually being depicted is their maturation process. Their development consists of the man making a mistake (often a substantial one) that he later recognizes and corrects. This is seen, for instance, when Mr. Smith lets Rose answer the phone though he had said that in the future only he would answer it. The biggest example of this is when Mr. Smith reverses his decision after he finally understands what the move to New York City would really entail for his family. This same pattern is also seen when Warren, after earlier failing to disclose his feelings (and a proposal of marriage) to Rose later decrees that she marry him. Additionally, this process displays itself when John, after not having kissed Esther after her house party, does so in their next quiet moment.

Since it is the women who explicitly inspire this metamorphosis while implicitly demanding it, the men's development goes beyond a personal venture and becomes a social one. Before investigating how the qualities of comprehension in men and patience in women are connate to this process (much of the subject matter of Part II), it is first necessary to explore when the emotions generated go beyond those of male cloddishness and female upset. I will analyse sequences in which the gender constructions of the Jane Austen model in the Smiths are so polarized that a situation of mutual hurt is created in one case, while a painful breach occurs in another. Feelings of shock and betrayal are felt by both men and women in these segments, and because these are crucial scenes in *Meet Me in St. Louis* they suggest that such emotions exist in the drive toward harmony within a complementary model. The first example, located in the opening Summer section, is the one of the family gathered around the dinner table. What takes place foreshadows another, more serious, episode of conflict within the family. This second incident occurs in the Autumn section when Mr. Smith informs the family of the transfer. I will analyse each scene separately, examining the sources of the shock and betrayal each side feels. Since the prevailing view has been to attribute the family's distress to the well-intended yet

tactless actions of Mr. Smith, I will pay special attention to his role within the household. Is he a disruptive force or a dutiful administrative patriarch?

Is he a vital figure or solely a nominal one? These are important questions, for although the movie is expressive of the matriarchal sphere within a male-ruled society, ascertaining Mr. Smith's function in the home is central for understanding the relationships in the family.

"Him being a man":

The Episode of Rose's Phone Call

Meet Me in St. Louis opens with an ornate sampler-like candy box top printed with the words "Summer, 1903." Featured prominently (though slightly off-centre) on this title card is a three storey Mid-Western style house, prosperous in appearance and surrounded by an abundant lawn. The house architecture and its comfortably spacious environs mark it as an early suburban residence, and as the camera comes to focus on it via a close-up, what is at first a picturesque tableau changes into an old-fashioned tintype. As a result, the home is able to retain its halcyon quality but shed its undiluted Victorian romanticism. This line from the purely sentimental towards a somewhat more quotidian representation, is further realized as the

image is then converted into a coloured freeze-frame. The sudden movement of various objects in the *mise -en-scène* (a pedestrian walking, horses pulling a beer wagon), as well as the introduction of diegetic sound, finally complete this unfolding by bringing this still "to life." This entire filmic progression, which lasts for only a few seconds of screen time, features a dense chronology of the very achievements in art and technology as they became part of popular culture from the start of the century: drawing, photography, silent pictures, talkies. This dense montage creates an uninterrupted link between a bygone era and today, making what is nostalgic modern but also providing an actual snapshot of the suburban transformation of heterosexual culture: Minnelli's "introductory device thus defines his film as both memory and present reality, both artistic stylization of experience and realistic reproduction of that experience."⁷⁹

The four main acts of the film are divided amongst the seasons, with each sequence commencing with the same series of filmic dissolves centred on the house. If the very image of the home can be taken to stand for the family or as that "private" space which shelters them from, as John Ruskin put it, the "terrible anonymous world of commerce and industry,"⁸⁰ then, either way, it

is a patterning device that facilitates the film's theme. It does this in a two-fold manner. First, as a structural mechanism it reinforces the narrative as one grounded in the Smiths, charting their progress toward harmony over time. Next, as an artistic conceit it employs the different seasons as general metaphors for the relative failure or realization of that goal: the Summer and Spring sequences reveal the family members at their closest (or sunniest), the Autumn and Winter sections at their most distant (or dimmest). But in keeping with the overall complexity of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, each season contains aspects of light and dark. Therefore even in the initial Summer sequence, a period of the film characterized by such activities as swimming and afternoon tennis, fun at evening parties, and first forays in love, there exist disturbing elements which prefigure events in the coming seasons. There is no more concentrated example of this than the episode of Rose's phone call. To understand why this incident encapsulates the anxiety that exists alongside the airy optimism of the Summer sequence, it is necessary to trace this dynamic in various parts of the narrative that precede it.

The scene wherein Rose awaits her long-distance call from Warren is an important one, because like the

inaugural image track of the Smith home, it stands as an establishing moment. If in the opening montage the family is introduced through the symbolism of the house, it is in this scene (some 18 minutes into the musical) that the entire family (including the housekeeper Katie) is first assembled together. In between these two segments most of the Smiths are individually presented.

On one hand, a few like the quartet of Lon, Jr., Agnes, Grandpa, and Esther enter the story in a uniquely separate yet united way. On the other hand, Mr. Smith makes his initial appearance in a manner that is completely isolated and closed. These introductory contrasts exemplify the oppositions within the family: unity/engagement/harmony versus detachment/disengagement/disconnection.

Using the same device he had so admired in Mamoulian's 1932 *Love Me Tonight*, Minnelli has a tune (the title song) pass, baton like, from Lon, Jr. to Agnes to Grandpa to Esther as the vehicle for their introductions. As James Naremore describes:

First we hear the Smith's only son, Lon, humming the tune to himself as he brings in the day's mail. Lon's sister Agnes, who has been playing outside with a garden hose, enters from a screen door, slips on an old pair of her father's shoes, and clomps

upstairs, singing "Meet Me in St. Louis" at the top of her voice. Cut to the second-floor bathroom where Grandpa Prophater hears Agnes approaching. As the grandfather exits the bath, he goes singing and waltzing down a corridor to his bedroom, where he tries on an assortment of colourful hats; suddenly we hear other voices, and from over his shoulder we look out a window to see Esther Smith and a couple of her friends riding up in a carriage. Brandishing a tennis racket, Esther alights at the front door and joins in a chorus, finishing off the number.⁸¹

"That song" as Mr. Smith will later complain, is all anyone in St. Louis sings. In this way, it might be said that the popular tune forms an entity greater than the four musical Smiths. Yet none is possessed by it; on the contrary, each pilots the song according to his or her own mood and temperament. This sequence makes manifest the idea that it is within a larger union that the self is most freely allowed its own differentiation.

In this number there is no conflict between the demands of family life and self-expression. What is shown is that each part invigorates and fortifies the other (affirming the social makes individuality possible even as individuals compose the basis of society). With marvelous economy, this sequence conveys a rich harmony operating in the household. The camera movements (with

all the panning and craning seamlessly linking individuals within a social network as the same song is shown passing from one character to another) and the manner in which the house is used (with rooms or hallways as expressive stages by individuals inside the larger family space), are filmic means for the depiction of balance.

As the song circulates first in, then around, and finally back outside the Smith home, the entire sequence is choreographed in a distinctly circular fashion. The orchestration of this sequence indicates that the core relationship will not be that of lovers, but the kinship of the family. To further underscore the family as the film's main object of romance (though not in the Freudian sense), the number is suffused with infectious warmth. Minnelli achieves this by the generally affectionate way the members of the family interact with one another, as well as by his loving recreation of a more "arcadian" era (through the use of splendid costumes, vivid colour, exquisite décor, and a satisfying blend of period music).

In addition, "Meet Me in St. Louis" showcases the separate personalities of the four Smiths. As I mentioned above, this is accomplished by turning what had been the symbol of the family-- the house --into a

space that facilitates self expression. As I will explore in Part II, there are very special instances of this that involve Judy Garland's Esther. But in this scene, it is Agnes' boisterous singing as she stomps up to the bathroom and Grandpa's nimble hallway capering as well as his festive spirit as he stands before his mirror, that display their lively personalities. (Lon, Jr.'s few hummed bars at the onset will prove to be emblematic of his sketchily drawn character.) Finally, after Rose enters the home differences between her and Esther surface. As Rose (Lucille Bremer) ascends the stairs, she dismisses her younger sister's organised attempt to create an atmosphere for her to receive Warren's call. In a lofty voice she says to the (literally) more down-to-earth Esther, "My dear, when you get to be my age, you'll learn that there are more important things in life than boys." But soon afterward in the family parlour, Rose and Esther reprise "Meet Me in St. Louis" at the piano. To display their underlying harmony, the photography and art direction frame and decorate them in one stupendous shot that resembles a St. Valentine's Day card or holy picture, thus communicating the most enchanting sisterly intimacy between them. From a low angle, the camera is tilted so that the duo are placed in dreamy counterpoint to a ceramic pair (angels? Victorian damsels? androgynous

lovers?) on top of the piano.

This particular iconic image is the apotheosis of what Minnelli has so meticulously built up through the use of the title song. But with the introduction of Mr. Smith in the shot that directly follows, a counterpoint is set up. In contrast to the pattern of unity-in-multiplicity established in the film so far, his actions launch a reverse momentum geared toward both destabilization and isolation. This is seen in the abrupt end he brings to the warm festiveness of his daughters' singing, a move which severs the line of harmony started by Lon, Jr. at the opening of the movie. "I wish everyone would meet at the [World's] Fair and leave me alone," Mr. Smith clamours before crossing his arms. Here and at crucial points in the story, his "entry from the outside world operates like a leitmotif, bringing with it a sense of potential disruption or disharmony."⁸² Here Mr. Smith figures as a "Sky Father," that is, as the kind of powerful patriarch "whose providence occurs from a distance and whose occasional presence in the family is striking because of his more usual absence."⁸³

As the episode of Rose's phone call makes clear, Mr. Smith's rigid (and consequently bumbling) presence does create emotional havoc. Likewise, he is seen commanding a rather dictatorial, even fearsome bearing (aspects

reflected in the unnaturally stiff and solemn posture the family assumes in his midst). Because these characteristics contrast so sharply with those of the other Smiths, they set him apart in a way that marginalizes him. Yet on a more imperative level, the anxiety and nervous comedy felt in this sequence derive from phenomena that are structural in nature before they are behavioural. The reaction of shock and betrayal which Mr. Smith will feel stems from a paradox lodged in the middle of this model, while the rest of the family will come to feel these emotions as the result of an abiding contradiction. Together they comprise examples of heterosexual males and females failing to locate a common ground and language.

Like a Greek chorus, Grandpa's satiric announcement "The Lord and Master!" opens the episode of Rose's phone call. It prepares the stage for the sequence by providing both a double-edged comment on Mr. Smith's position in the household (just before he is heard tripping noisily off-screen), and a cue for his entrance. These words stress Mr. Smith's regency while drily mocking it. With the family members conspiring to rush dinner so that Rose is able to hear her (possible) marriage proposal from Warren privately, this sequence reveals how Mr. Smith's authority within the family is

largely empty and ostensible. For this reason, Mr. Smith's fall over Tootie's missing skate at the start prefigures how the women intend to act around him at the dinner table: by giving him the slip. Still, Mr. Smith is not altogether impotent since there is no reason to feel that he will not punish Tootie as he promises; one power he does possess is having the last word. That the turn-of-the-century patriarchal culture of St. Louis is seen resting upon the matriarchal sphere of the home is made manifest. Men "unmanned by the contagion of domesticity"⁸⁴ forms a trope in US literature (Herman Melville, Henry James, Sinclair Lewis) and film (Hitchcock's 1943 *Shadow of a Doubt*, Frank Capra's 1946 *It's a Wonderful Life*). After clumsily learning of the family's ruse Mr. Smith asks with consternation, "Just when was I voted out of this family?" His feeling of insignificance is compounded by knowing that even the youngest daughters (Tootie, Agnes), as well as the other Smith males (Lon, Jr., Grandpa), are all in on the "intrigue." Moreover the information kept from him has made him look foolish, and his lack of awareness has led to actions that have caused pain to Rose. Mr. Smith is the odd one out, and he knows it: "My eldest daughter is practically on her honeymoon, and everyone in St. Louis knows about it but me." But while he thinks that their underhanded behaviour is to blame, everyone-- including

Mr. Smith --fails to perceive the intrinsic cause of this strained episode. What they do not see is that by granting women exclusive domain of the nurturing function, they help to create Sky Fathers.

Esther says to her father, "You just ruined Rose's chance to get married, that's all." Thus, for his part, Mr. Smith's loutish handling of the phone call meets with various negative reactions amongst the women (Esther, sad frustration; Rose, heartache; Mrs. Smith, quiet embarrassment; Katie, dour obstinance). Even so, the collective feeling they express is a combination of shock and betrayal. These emotions seem, without question, attributable to the crude behaviour of Mr. Smith. (What Warren does, or actually fails to do, in the second half of this sequence will provoke a similar response.) Yet on closer inspection, the real source of the women's outrage is structural. That they expect men like Mr. Smith to be attuned to the complex signs and nuances of romance while keeping them outside the loop of domestic life, reveals a tearing (as well as tear-filled) contradiction. This disparity is descriptive of the relationship between the males and females throughout the film.

The first quarter hour alone of *Meet Me in St. Louis* is evidence of this. Due to its (well-earned) layers of

charm, it is easy to overlook that these minutes are replete with expectations by one side or the other which go unsatisfied. They form a catalogue of occurrences wherein men suppose that women know and appreciate their domain, and women presume the same of men: Esther and Rose anticipating that John (Tom Drake) will put down his pipe and stop practicing his collegiate look long enough to take notice of them; Tootie assuming that ice man Mr. Neely (Chill Wills) knows the proper pronunciation of St. Louis and its formal municipal status; Mr. Smith expecting his oldest daughters to appreciate the value of money and the difficulty of financially providing for others; Esther, Mrs. Smith, and Rose counting on Mr. Smith changing his schedule whilst Mr. Smith takes for granted that the women understand his need to unwind after a trying day at work. Together these situations amount to small tremors along the fault line of structural inconsistencies the two sides hold regarding gender. However the episode of Rose's phone call comprises the biggest jolt emanating from these clashing tectonic plates of expectation. After what happens between Mr. Smith and the women, these opposed expectations likewise emerge in the conversation between Rose and Warren: she, anxiously hoping for wedding bells; he, amazed by the technology of instant nationwide communication. This idea of a

"natural" disjunction between the genders is wryly summed up in Katie's (Marjorie Main) earlier concocted story of why her sister was having husband troubles: "him being a man."

The Episode of the Announcement to Move
to New York City and the Meaning of Mr. Smith

This sequence marks Mr. Smith's third entry into the narrative. It occurs well past midway, and follows a succession of Thornton Wilder/William Saroyan-like vignettes (Lon, Jr.'s goodbye party, the highs and lows of Esther's romance with John, and Tootie's activities on Halloween night). His actions combine the aspects of his previous entrances, namely, that of being an intruder (as in his initial scene), and that of being a man out of touch with the vital life of his family (as in the telephone episode). All the same, however, the viewer is not prepared for the change his behaviour in this sequence will bring toward radically altering the film's mood and direction. Because Minnelli has Mr. Smith absent so long while showing how emotionally self-sustaining the rest of the family is, the plan of relocating the family to New York City seems all the more unexpected. This provides *Meet Me in St. Louis* with its narrative conflict-- an antagonism that serves to emphasize its abiding thematic concerns.

As with the episode of Rose's phone call, the reasons why each side feels shocked and betrayed by the other are given equal treatment. Yet in both cases, sympathy tilts more toward the women's psychological point of view because the focus has been on them all along. Furthermore it becomes clear that while Mr. Smith stands to gain by moving to the East (it is a promotion), the women stand to lose: "Mrs. Smith will lose her home, Katie will lose her job, Rose will lose her beaux, Esther will lose John Truett, [and] Agnes and Tootie will lose their playmates."⁸⁵ The one advantage of the move, that of a higher income, is felt to be cancelled by the prospect of residing "cooped up in a tenement" rather than living in their own spacious home. As Tootie sadly remarks, "I'd rather be poor if we could only stay here; I'd rather go with the orphalins [sic] at the orphalins' home." And as Esther complains, moving would mean that they miss the World's Fair just as "St. Louis was going to be the centre of attraction in the entire universe." Mr. Smith is regarded with affection and so cannot be positioned as the "villain" of the piece; at the same time, his good intentions appear fated to reduce the family to his own alienation and marginalization.

Viewed, however, within a heteropatriarchal type of complementary gender relations, it is difficult to fault his decision. It is easy to overlook, as the women do, that Mr. Smith is fulfilling the role and responsibility entrusted to him. As he explains, "I've got the future to think about-- the future for all of us. I've got to worry where the money's coming from." The women fail to appreciate their breadwinner's hard work and accomplishment, and this scene reveals how they want a certain amount of material affluence but without the attendant cost (whether experienced in socio-economic terms or being tied to emotionally underdeveloped men).

Therefore when Rose thoughtlessly exclaims "Money! I hate, loathe, despise and abominate money!," Mr. Smith's snappy retort ("You also spend it") is on-target. Given their polarized roles, it is not surprising that the women should have as little knowledge of the monetary realm as the men do of the nurturing one.

The most basic insight, though, is that parallel to the previous episode, the strong sensations of shock and betrayal felt here arise from opposed gender expectations. In the former sequence, Rose's phone call was meant to be kept hidden from Mr. Smith. But had the deception been successful and, in addition, had Warren succeeded in proposing (and Rose had said yes), it is

certain that Mr. Smith would have been informed of their impending marriage. It is important to stress the point that, at least in the eyes of the other family members, Mr. Smith was not to be made part of this collaborative process. The reason for this is that within this Jane Austen model such work falls under the province of women. In summing up this perspective, Grandpa (in some ways one of the gals) tells Agnes, "Your papa is not supposed to know. It's enough that we're letting him work hard every day to support the whole flock of us. He can't have everything." With his family failing to include him, Mr. Smith is shut out of this dimension of domestic life even though the women are only doing what is required of them. Yet for his part, Mr. Smith acts in a similar manner when he announces the transfer to New York City. By notifying the family of his crucial decision only after he has everything settled, he duplicates what the women had intended to do with the situation of Rose and Warren. Hence in each of these episodes, both sides experience shock and betrayal as the result of feeling unfairly excluded from the very dynamics and domains where their exclusion is properly expected. Men and women want it both ways, yet they do not see this powerful discrepancy.

Having analysed the major sequences in which Mr. Smith interacts with his family, it is now possible to pinpoint his precise role. When he enters the home he is a marginal figure who nevertheless commands enough authority to disrupt domestic harmony. But his real significance does not end with this description. Rather, his status as the putative head of the family is the very thing which allows him a deeper (symptomatic) function. By Mr. Smith being an autocratic yet peripheral personage, precarious aspects of this binary gender model are exposed. As I have detailed, his actions highlight the serious contradiction whereby each gender is set up as exclusive and unique, but is somehow expected to have astute knowledge of the other. This situation, in turn, has the effect of raising the issue of what heterosexual males and females have in common, and following that, how they can live together. Part of the beauty of this film is the verisimilitude it brings to these problems in complementary relationships. An even greater part of its charm and allure has to do with the way it represents the joys of this model, and the manner that men and women prevail over its innate difficulties.

Part II

The Ecstasy of Difference

As I explored in Part I, males in *Meet Me in St. Louis* enjoy an autonomy outside the home that the domestically-linked females do not possess. I also examined how the film bestows upon the females metabolic qualities in regard to relational being (love, romance) which give them a level of personal and social awareness lacking in males. Thus, each gender is master of certain realms which the other finds difficult to enter.

Yet as I argued, the rhetorical structure of *Meet Me in St. Louis* derives from the women. This is because the narrative is presented from their point of view, a collective whose position forms what George M. Wilson would call the film's "epistemic base."⁸⁶ In his valuable essay "*Meet Me in St. Louis: Smith, or the Ambiguities*," Andrew Britton contends that it is Tootie who stands as "the crux of the film, the register of its defining tensions."⁸⁷ Yet I will show that it is the Esther-Tootie couplet which more accurately fits this description. Analysing them permits one to understand how they encapsulate what for the Smith family is the condition of harmonious complementary relations ("their demand for an identity of their lives with the reality of their dreams" as Elsaesser puts it⁸⁸). At nearly opposite ends of the line of Smith girls, the pair

embody vital points along the female maturation process. Studying them allows one to trace the women's development.

Figures of Force and Magnetism:

Esther and Tootie

In a film whose principal theme and structurally defining aspect is that of harmony, the special kinship between Esther and Tootie is a prototype of balance and equilibrium. Esther's melancholy optimism is a counterweight to Tootie's delectable ghoulishness, and vice versa. Seeing their relationship in terms of geometric design, the pattern that arises goes beyond that of an impeccable yet lifeless symmetry. Instead the shape of their bond resembles the organic iconographic diagram of yin and yang, that symbiotic configuration of paired opposites wherein aspects of one side are found in the other. Psychologically Esther and Tootie "complete" each other as males and females are thought to do within the Jane Austen model-- but without the sexual tension and misreadings. As a result, it is Esther and Tootie who are really the movie's lead pair and not Esther and John, Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith, Rose and Warren, or Lon, Jr. and Lucille. Their compatibility radiates a winsome magnetism. This quality derives from numerous essential factors (not

only Minnelli's direction, but the acting skills of Garland's Esther and Margaret O'Brien's Tootie, to name the most obvious), yet in what follows I want to look at a slightly less apparent source of their chemistry: namely, the very outline of their relationship.

In line with Taoism, Carl Jung saw that complementary yin and yang arrangements manifest a luminous attraction because they are believed to reflect the inner dynamics of psychological well-being. Holding that "there is no balance, no system of self-regulation, without opposition,"⁸⁹ he posited that the clash of two contraries released a potential creative energy. Since, as Cavell argues, healthy complementary union anchors rather than erodes the sense of self, such relationships were felt by Jung to emit a high value intensity. When Elsaesser states in his essay that a "vast number of films seem to 'work' because they are built around a psychic law and not an intellectual one,"⁹⁰ what he says helps to explain why the pair emerge as the axial figures. Discovering that adherence to this "psychic law" is what makes the best Hollywood films successful, he finds that they operate along a "pleasure principle"-like mechanism which satisfies the psychological, moral, and aesthetic expectations of the viewer. Because Esther and Tootie embody the harmony the family strives

to realize, I think that Elsaesser's theory accounts for much of the viewer's investment in them.

To explain this phenomenon, I will make use of a central binarism employed by Nietzsche. This will allow me to analyse why the two sisters are so well bonded though they are so dissimilar, and why their rapport personifies the quality of relational harmony. By juxtaposing onto Esther and Tootie, respectively, the forces akin to but not precisely the same as, Apollonian formalism and Dionysian formlessness, I will show how Nietzsche's pair of competing yet complementary locomotions permit one to understand the vitality found in their relationship.

What Nietzsche termed the Apollonian tendency included all those elements which make social life possible, namely, those aspects related to the cultural project of patterning and regulation (or order and control). The Dionysian tendency, in total contrast, meant for him the instinctual drive toward anarchy and ecstasy (or transgression and intoxication). Borrowing from the early Greeks the mythic characteristics of Apollo and Dionysus in order to describe these dual poles, Nietzsche wrote that the former is the form-giving force which seeks to "grant repose to individual beings. . . .by drawing boundaries around them." At the same time,

the latter is the force that occasionally smashes these "little circles" for fear that the Apollonian tendency "congeal the form to Egyptian rigidity and coldness."⁹¹

Trying to keep her passion checked, Esther is highly suggestive (though never a chess piece) of the Apollonian tendency. Shown sublimating her energy and redirecting it for the greater welfare of the family, this modification of her pep finds expression in the many instances where her efforts are either geared toward maintaining or restoring social order. For this reason, Dyer calls her "the Miss Fix-It of the household."⁹² It is in keeping with her character that even in her first full scene she helps to resolve a family debate (over how the ketchup being made should taste). Other examples of Esther's attempts to provide form and stability include: arranging things so that Rose might be alone when Warren calls; dealing with John when she thinks that he has physically harmed Tootie; making sure that Lucille Ballard has a miserable time at the Christmas ball; and endeavouring to calm a distraught Tootie about the future of the family just as it seems on the verge of breakup. Due to the way she is presented as such a protective, proactive figure, it is easy to mistake her as the oldest Smith daughter. Importantly, what fuels her take-charge disposition is

the very energy she denies for herself.

Nevertheless Esther is not an egoless 17-year old. A large part of her appeal lies in her being neither impossibly self-denying nor caught up in constant teenage self-absorption. Rather, Esther is seen looking out for others even as she tries to realize her own dreams. Yet, as Dyer notes, it is her goal of possessing her heart's desire (John Truett) that largely accounts for why she sublimates her vim and vigour.

This pep must be confined if she is to get the boy next door and end up like her mother-- by pinching the 'bloom out of her cheeks, by squeezing herself into the tightest corset, by accepting the humiliation of going with Grandad to the Christmas ball and dancing with the least attractive men. It is only after all this that John proposes to her.⁹³

In comparing her social aim of family harmony versus her personal aim of union with John, it is notable that she is victorious in the latter but not in the former. At best, her record as a force of order in the household is mixed (avenging Tootie by attacking John-- only to learn that he aided rather than abused her younger sister; planning it so that Ballard dances with the worst men later to learn of the Easterner's thoroughly unconceited

charm). At worst, her actions in this area fall flat (not saving Rose from having her conversation turned into a social event; not being able to convince Tootie that the family will stay happily united). Why does the tireless, but earnestly imaginative Esther succeed in the personal realm but not in the social? The answer: music. Britton recognized how the songs "mark repeatedly a point of tension between containment and overflow,"⁹⁴ observing that the majority of Esther's numbers (four out of seven) are directly inspired by her love of John. Singing is thus the means for her to "vent" her contained passion: wistful longing ("The Boy Next Door"), coy calculation and expectation ("Over the Banister"), exhilaration ("The Trolley Song"), and blind faith and optimism ("Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"). These numbers offer her a vital channel of release that does not seem as necessary when she performs her non-solo/group songs (the title tune, "Skip to My Lou," "Under the Bamboo Tree"). Furthermore they allow the Apollonian-minded Esther a truly lyrical means of self-expression which compensates for her enabling role in the family. Later I will examine how it is that Esther's singing allows her to voice her dreams even as she champions structure and control.

As Sam Wood explored in 1942's *King's Row* ("A good town to live in and a good place to raise your children") and as David Lynch did with the white picket fence community of Lumberton in *Blue Velvet* (1986), Minnelli looks at some of the darker elements of small town USA in *Meet Me in St. Louis*. (Within the historical context of the film, a Mid-west city like St. Louis could also be viewed as a "community."⁹⁵) With her precocious fixation on the criminal ("Sweet?! She's a hoodlum!") and the taboo (death, disease, murder, addiction), Minnelli accomplishes this largely through the figure of Tootie.

With her glorious carnivalesque playfulness and bent toward the delinquent, she is redolent of the Dionysian tendency. Tootie may be a "pint-sized Lucretia Borgia"⁹⁶ but is an endearing, impish one. Lovable and angelic looking, she is determined to have fun by overturning community values and rules. (The difference between her and Mr. Smith is that disruption is intended in the former and unintended in the latter.) Toward this end, the five-year old Smith displays an aggressive will that matches Esther's own resoluteness. Just as with Mr. Smith and Esther, her behaviour in her initial scene (riding the ice wagon with her "sickly" doll and the affable Mr. Neeley) is a superb introduction to her character.

TOOTIE: Poor Margaretha, never seen her look
 so pale.

MR. NEELEY: The sun ought to do her some good.

TOOTIE: I expect she won't live through the
 night. She has four fatal diseases.

MR. NEELEY: (drily) And it only takes one.

TOOTIE: But she's gonna have a beautiful
 funeral in a cigar box my papa gave
 me. All wrapped in silver paper.

MR. NEELEY: That's the way to go if you have to
 go.

TOOTIE: Oh, she has to go.

If Esther is the Apollonic "shining one"⁹⁷ driven to uphold the social contract, what Tootie's Dionysiac bearing finds alluring is life's grisly, aberrant, and chthonic aspects. Throughout the narrative Tootie's warped attention to such lurid subject matter allows her to make the most startling (and perversely humorous) comments and outbursts-- often at truly unexpected moments. For example: "The gas man saw a drunkard get shot yesterday and the blood spurted out three feet!"; "It will take at least a week to dig up all my dolls from the cemetery"; and breathlessly, "I dreamt a big wave came up and flooded the whole city and when the

water went back it was all muddy and horrible and full of dead bodies." Tootie's particular energy injects bits of *grand guignol* into what could otherwise be a film hovering close to Andy Hardy-like sentiment. Indeed as Altman warns, "When the past is so prettified that its threatening side is hidden, there is a corresponding loss of seriousness and depth."⁹⁸ Her presence gives the film a richness and complexity, for just as Esther's romanticism problematizes ideas regarding one so pragmatic, Tootie's macabre personality disputes notions regarding childhood innocence. The grandest displays of Tootie's transgressive behaviour happen in the Autumn section. More than any other character, what she says and does here sets its entire atmosphere. In contrast to the light-hearted Summer section, the elegiac Winter sequence, and the jubilant Spring conclusion, the dramatic Autumn installment is imbued with the tokens of her personality: death and subversion. This season begins appropriately with the Dionysiac celebration of Halloween night. (Later in this Fall segment Tootie will claim that John tried to "kill her," Rose will say that Tootie and Agnes' prank of derailing the trolley car could have made them murderers, and Mr. Smith will remark that transferring the family East was taken as a "crime worse than murder.")

As revealed in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, the spirit of Halloween is one which "inverts the patriarchal and heterosexual values of the film, confusing genders and setting domestic property afire."⁹⁹ Against a bonfire with most of the boys dressed as women, and the majority of girls (like Tootie and Agnes) dressed like men, the aim of the children is to "kill" their adult victims by throwing flour in their faces. To win the respect of the other kids, young Tootie (dressed as a "horrible ghost") volunteers to "murder" Mr. Braukoff, the most feared man on the block. He is reputed to poison cats, beat his wife, and have empty whiskey bottles in his cellar. After accomplishing her criminal task, she ecstatically cries "I've killed him! I'm the most horrible!!" Earlier as she had marched up to her neighbour's front door in a long tracking shot, such set determination in so tiny a body had made Tootie utterly disarming. Yet after the success of her mission, there is something disturbing in the rapturous, even orgiastic way she announces her deed. If music allows Esther a release, then such rituals seem to have the same function for Tootie. These spaces (be they Esther's musical numbers or the crazed operatic bliss of Tootie's Halloween exploit) reveal passion as key to imagination and social ordering-- as long as it is sublimated or contained.

An equilibrium exists between Esther and Tootie in the best Jane Austen manner, because each contains traits of the other (here the model is not Pride and Prejudice's Darcy and Elizabeth, but that of Sense and Sensibility's Dashwood sisters). When Mr. Smith trips over her skate, for example, the usually brigand Tootie asks to be reminded of her spanking lest her father forgets to administer the punishment. Meanwhile undisguised parts of the lawless Tootie mark Esther's behaviour. One case in point is found in some of what she sings about in the down home "Skip to My Lou" frolic: spurning social authority, and spending time with a number of men at out-of-town parties.

So as far apart as the framing Esther and the unrestrained Tootie are, one quality they share is their fictive imagination. But another is their appetite for immediacy. Each is impatient or dissatisfied with the everyday, and thus is seen striving for the "reality" behind the ordinary. Esther says before the party that she wants her first encounter with John to be "strange and wonderful and something I'll always remember." But that could also describe her attitude toward romance, and furthermore, life (however conventional in form). For her part, Tootie is fixated on schemes related to experience of the savage and the grotesque. For Esther

this immediacy occurs when she escapes from the world around her, while for Tootie it transpires when she engages with its dark or subterranean side. In analysing the categories of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, each tendency revolts against the abstract and the vicarious, and goes to the heart of living:

The Dionysian symbolizes an impulse toward a direct, not a mediated, participation in the reality of experience; the Apollonian symbolizes an impulse toward the attainment of a similar immediacy through submergence in the unrealistic world of dream and fantasy, a world that is seen as embodying a truer and deeper reality than that of 'normal' experience.¹⁰⁰

Nowhere is the sense of complementariness existing between the two sisters better viewed than in the number "Under the Bamboo Tree." Such is its handling (fittingly they choose a popular "coon" song to entertain their audience since this type of music was usually performed by white women) that Esther's social skills and Tootie's naughtiness are balanced and blended even as they are separately presented. The contagious warmth and charm that derive from their actions and interactions establishes, early on, the harmony that circulates between them. In order to show the "naturalness" of their bond, this 1902 hit tune is

carefully constructed. Esther acts as the guide and prompter which allows Tootie not only to be led but to perform in a less mindful, more "visceral" manner. Far from dominating the proceedings, Esther at times subordinates herself to enable Tootie to "shine" or to permit the littlest Smith the commanding role. On the one hand, the side by side and mirroring dance motions between them radiate affinity. On the other hand, their differences come across. This is not only observed in who leads versus who follows and how this arrangement is constantly negotiated, but in the lack of perfect timing, missed cues, and other mistakes they occasionally make.

Esther organizes their movements from before the start of the number (where Tootie is granted her wish to enter from the left side of the informal "stage") to after its finish (where Esther motions to Tootie for them to exit once their bows are taken). She pushes Tootie into proper position following their circling "American Indian style" folded-arm and stoic-faced entrance, gestures to her when to begin singing, and keeps an eye on her during the cancan-like (*emboite*) portion to make sure that she is dancing in sync. Managing Tootie is not the only thing Esther oversees. Prior to the performance Esther speedily selects the costumes and

props (finding the right straw hats and canes), and hurriedly indicates to Rose the necessary musical introduction. (Later at one point in the skit Esther will call out to Rose to play a "vamp" section.)

Importantly, she sometimes either gives or allows Tootie the initiative, thus exhibiting love as well as a knowledge of real leadership. An example of this is when their signals cross, and Tootie is left waiting to start a step-touch. Esther does not immediately pick up on her cue, but once she does the two perform this movement with the fun that is characteristic of the entire number.

Another instance of Esther passing the initiative over to her sister happens when she crouches beneath Tootie's arms as they form the top of an imaginary tree. From her knelt position Esther sings "Awaiting there his love to see," and then springs up to imitate Tootie's artful stance. Never taking their eyes from each other, Tootie sings the line "To her he'd sing" while Esther only mouths it. This permits Tootie's singing to be heard just as Esther's had been. Repeating the same line, they next join in a beautiful two-part harmony. As they do, both lower their arms in one slow, graceful movement and duplicate on a visual level what their voices are creating on a sonorous one. So in spite of their

complementary differences (control versus spontaneity), they seem to be of one mind. Singing together "One lives as two/Two lives as one" and matched by the choreography of their fingers and by their turns to one another-- not to mention the minstrel shuffles and burlesque step-kicks that follow --all form further exuberant examples.

Having looked at the overall character arrangements of Esther and Tootie, it is now possible to understand the maturation process seen in the Smith females. What is shown is that as they ascend in age there is a movement away from the Dionysian and toward the Apollonian. This is evident in the way Esther, Rose, Mrs. Smith, and Katie (a surrogate member of the family) are seen dividing their lives along the public/private binary, whilst Tootie and Agnes (Joan Carroll) do not. Such a discrimination is manifestly an Apollonian undertaking, since it is a conceit that is socially constructed. Because Tootie and Agnes have not yet learned to fashion their lives around this culturally orchestrated division, they enjoy a wide-ranging fluidity that allows them uncensored self-expression. Not adhering to this artificial framework also explains, for instance, a good deal of why the youngest sisters poke fun at the supposedly "secret" love lives of Rose and Esther

("Roses are red and John's name is Truett/Esther's in love and we always knew it."). Since the socially taboo always resides in the "private" realm, the very structure they rib is one that makes their attraction to the illicit possible. This points to a contradiction in these categories of the social and the natural, namely, that wild, chaotic "nature" ends up being a construction. In other words, rather than "nature" standing as the preexisting basis of reality, the Dionysian realm can be read as nothing more than a product of the Apollonian mind (such as its "shadow")! In this way, *Meet Me in St. Louis* reveals the contingency of these terms by showing their mutual dependence.

What takes place that leads the women to compartmentalize their lives along the "public" versus "private" split? The experience of falling in love is what initiates this personality division in their development. Every reference to the private sphere in the film has to do with being in love, and the enormous difficulty (indeed, the impossibility) of keeping this vital part of life apart from the "public" dimension: the failed attempt to design things so that Rose can talk to Warren unheard; Rose's frustrated cry ("I must say it's very difficult for anyone to have a private

life in this house") because of the teasing she gets from Agnes, Tootie, and Grandpa regarding her interest in Colonel Darly; and the scene where Grandpa offers to escort Esther to the Christmas ball after overhearing of her plight due to the paper-thin walls. With men functioning as the chief architects of the Apollonian project, emotions such as love necessitate that women carve out an enclave that allows them to enjoy the feelings that men omit. Later it becomes part of their patient abilities to teach men the dynamics of relational being.

What enables the Smith women to possess and retain the Dionysiac quality of love is that they never entirely lose contact with life's chthonic dimension as they grow older. This is without doubt the most singular aspect of *Meet Me in St. Louis*'s gender constructions. What is fascinating is that though Agnes and especially Tootie keep notions of the dangerous and the hooligan alive, the older Smith females do not suppress this feature whether in the youngest girls or even at times within themselves. This clarifies, for instance, the curious phenomenon of why Tootie is never seriously chastised for her remarks or deeds. In her most serious disruption of the social order (derailing the trolley and falsely accusing John of trying to kill her), Esther

and Rose find themselves helplessly reduced to laughter by their sister's twisted exploits. This explains less benevolent moments seen in the family's matriarchs, too.

Just as Esther is encoded with aspects of Tootie, so is Katie (as heard in her barbed, even sadistic wit), and on one occasion, Mrs. Smith (seen in a bemused sidelong grin as she matter-of-factly exposes Esther's plan to conceal Warren's call).

The Musical Numbers as Thematic Reflectors

I have saved most of my examination of *Meet Me in St. Louis*'s acclaimed musical numbers until the end, for the reason that it was essential to map out the film's movement toward harmony as well as the structural obstacles that lay in that path. Such an outline was needed, as I will argue, because of the way the songs seem to mirror these competing narrative crosscurrents.

I will distinguish between the Esther solos ("The Boy Next Door," "Over the Banister," "The Trolley Song," and "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas") and the partial and/or non-Esther numbers (the title song, "Skip to My Lou," "Under the Bamboo Tree," and "You and I"). In the first part of the chapter I examined the title song and "Under the Bamboo Tree," and in what follows I will concentrate on "Over the Banister," "Skip to My Lou," "You and I," and "Have Yourself a Merry Little

Christmas."

The Esther Solos

In my comparison of Esther and Tootie, I explained why the Smith family's "Miss Fix-It" uses music as a much-needed psychological correlative in her life. It offers Esther both the articulation and release of passion which her ordering function in the house does not permit. As with torch song or blues, these songs allow mainly for solo rather than duet or choral delivery. Garland infuses them with a fervid intensity not felt when she sings with others. There is a kind of transcendental (though not necessarily blissful) aspect to her solos in that they offer an expressivity ordinarily outside the ambit of such an Apollonian figure. Most of her solos show her yearning for romance and all, at least in some way, reveal the problem of complementary union between men and women. In "The Boy Next Door" she declares her love for the new neighbour who does not even know she exists; in "Over the Banister" she is placed in the position of singing a song written from the male point of view and thereby serenading herself; in "The Trolley Song" she is inspired by the sight of John to belt out this number but finds herself holding her own hand in the end; and finally in "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" she

is torn between her love of John and maintaining the solidarity of her family. A strain of apprehension runs through these four songs, and they are less playful than the title tune, "Skip to My Lou," or "Under the Bamboo Tree." However they allow Esther a means of articulation and release. Nonetheless they also resonate a bittersweet, unsatisfied quality.

Of the film's gender dynamics, the "reversal of the convention which dictates that sexual aggression is the prerogative of the male is contained within and defined by the convention which prescribes marriage as the destiny of the female."¹⁰¹ That is, Esther must work to fashion herself as the subject of John's desire while simultaneously acting to educate him in the art of courtship. Therefore she is forced to perform as both the "male" and the "female" at the start of their arrangement. This situation is riddled with clashes, inconsistencies, and snares. First, Esther must make the moves to secure herself in marriage, but without her efforts appearing conscious. Second, she must tutor John in the feeling realm, yet do so while giving the impression that he is more adept and aggressive in the field of love.

In this regard, few areas of *Meet Me in St. Louis* better exhibit the particular difficulty of this model of heterosexual love than those involving Esther's solo numbers. To understand the gender identities she must skillfully move in and out of (or inhabit at the same time!), it is first necessary to recognize that in any other stage or screen musical each of these songs would probably have been sung by its leading man. In this way, it is not hard to imagine the male protagonist direct yet another tuneful ode to the archetypal girl next door, or connect the mechanical rhythms of a popular technology to the amatory beats of his heart, or try to reassure a distressed kid sister that things are not as bad as they seem. The film constantly stresses the need for Esther and Rose to locate their selfhood in the realm of matrimony. As Esther reminds Katie of Rose's dilemma early on, "The brutal fact is she isn't getting any younger." Here questions arise. Is it because Esther must take command of the romantic arena (which, as already analysed, is ironically the men's role) that undercuts a successful resolution in her solo songs? Does her being female subvert her agency in these numbers? What would the chances be, for example, that the power of the male gaze would have been as ineffectual as what is seen in "The Boy Next Door"? Or that a big bouncy production number like "The Trolley

Song" would have ended as anticlimactic had it been built around a leading man? Or, still further, that a male figure would fail so miserably as a morale booster as what transpires at the close of "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"? Each of these numbers emphasizes the double standards set against Esther that she must surmount.

Of Esther's four solos it is only in the one where she resorts to manipulation that she achieves any success: "Over the Banister." Beginning with her "untoward request" to have John accompany her in turning off the lights to her singing as she stands above him on the staircase, gentle dialogue and gestures fill her handling of the situation. These include the demure way Esther stealthily presses herself next to him as he attends to the fixtures ("Well, it's certainly dark in here with the lights off"), the moment she starts to hum "The Boy Next Door" as he continues his assistance, and the sensitive, wholly responsive manner she hangs on to his every word and movement. As Bathrick points out, the film links technology to courtship and sees that both are products dependent on human manipulation for personal and social benefit. (This is in contrast to the ambivalent view of technology seen in another movie set in the Mid-west at the turn of the century, Welles'

The Magnificent Ambersons [1942])). Using telephones and trolleys, Minnelli relates romance to technology in other scenes as well. But of all the instances of technology in the service of young love, none is as efficacious as the sequence surrounding the "Over the Banister" number.

Here the "prolonged and carefully coordinated effort by which the half-gas and half-electric chandeliers are dimmed produces a new but no less romantic kind of goodnight ritual."¹⁰² Yet the harmony of new technology and old-fashioned romance is only one part of the cohesion seen in this number and the "turning off the lights" sequence. Whether it be persons or objects, all the things within the *mise-en-scène* are integrated. This is seen, for instance, in the heavy décor of the Smith house. Despite the great assortment of patterns found in the parlour and staircase (objects like flocked wallpaper, mohair furniture, stained glass windows, and oriental carpets), these items nevertheless blend together. This quality of integration also marks the combination of party clothes worn by Esther and John. Not only does what they wear complement parts of their attire and colouring (hair and skin tone), but them as a couple. Her cornflower jacket and dress harmonize with her physical features as well as with his double-

breasted navy blazer, white shirt and slacks. Her restrained chiffon scarf of canary yellow highlights too the powder blue she is otherwise attired in, and, correspondingly, the blue of John's clothes. Aside from art direction and costuming, the way the sequence is filmed also is a piece with the integrity constructed. This is seen in the painstaking fluid single take that follows the pair as they turn off the lights.

If the use of technology acts as a vehicle (and a metaphor) for courtship, twice here John tactlessly breaks the finesse or spell Esther is trying to engineer: first, by him telling her that her perfume is the same his grandmother wears; second, by shaking her hand rather than kissing her before leaving. However he does see in her beauty a half-recalled poem. When he cannot fully recite the words, she helps him. With her vibrato voice, she converts the lines to lyrics and the change becomes "Over the Banister." This places Esther in the awkward position of playing Romeo to her own Juliet (she pauses before the words "loveliest face"), but the song's content captures her "beguiling" allure and the scene between them:

While below her with tender grace
he watches the picture, smiling.
A light burns dim in the hall below,
nobody sees them standing.
Saying goodnight again soft and low
halfway up to the landing.

Nobody, only those eyes of brown,
tender and full of meaning.
Gaze on the loveliest face in town
over the banister leaning.

The gender operations in this sequence are more intricate still. For in spite of the role-reversal, what her crafting of the scene and the words of the song make clear ("he watches the picture"), is that Esther turns herself into the very image of "femininity." As with "The Boy Next Door" (with its mirror, window frame, and curtain), "Under the Bamboo Tree" (with its dining room entrance arch), "The Trolley Song" (with its open air upper deck serving as a platform), and "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" (again, with its window frame), Esther transforms the landing halfway up the stairs into a stage-like arena. In this action, she at last becomes a desirable woman in John's eyes even as the scene reveals the mechanisms that went into making this outcome possible. Yet besides being a means of getting John's attention, what Esther does in this solo number (and in "The Boy Next Door") has a salvific

bearing (in the generative rather than redemptive sense). This is because these musical sequences disclose profound moments in Esther's development for they show her giving birth to herself.¹⁰³ They enable her not only to express her otherwise sublimated Dionysiac side, but by converting "private" space into show space, help her to reconcile inner passions with her ordered workaday world.

The Partial and/or Non-Esther Numbers

Just as Esther's solos tend to exhibit the more challenging and toilsome side of complementary heterosexual gender relations, the other musical numbers in *Meet Me in St. Louis* display the open compatibility of men and women. Rather than laying bare the gulf dividing the groups, two out of the three songs demonstrate the actual, not potential, harmony existing between them. An air of festive ease is found in "Skip to My Lou" while an atmosphere of tender devotion surrounds "You and I." In the first one, Esther shares the spotlight with others, while in the second one Mr. and Mrs. Smith are the central performers. These songs achieve the social harmony so absent in many parts of the narrative, as well as in those numbers Esther has to herself.

"Skip to My Lou" and "Under the Bamboo Tree" are the liveliest numbers in the film. They occur nearly back-to-back within Lon, Jr.'s college send-off party during the Summer section. Each is a marvelous depiction of the "effortlessness" of heterosexual arrangements, but they present this in very different ways. In "Skip to My Lou" the music is folkloric, the dancing resembles a hoedown, the lyrics are silly yet have a remarkably contemporary sensibility, and the camera is seldom at rest. In "Under the Bamboo Tree" the music is that of "coon" show-cum-vaudeville, the dancing features an eclectic cultural mix, the lyrics are racist and sexist but are carefully underplayed and eclipsed by charm, and the use of the camera is far more restrained. In the former, as the camera follows the dazzling succession of delicate yet elaborate designs of happily strutting couples, two points suggest themselves. One is that a kind of rhythmicity exists between males and females which allows them to "dance" to an ever shifting variety of complex and beautiful patterns; the other is that they derive pleasure from doing so. By following Charles Walters' choreography, the camerawork becomes a cinematography of heterosexual rhapsody. The rich and varied use of colour seen in the clothes worn by the partygoers as well as those found in the furnishings of the Smith home, further contribute to this feeling of

vibrancy and energy. Most of the singing is confined to the party's hosts (Lon, Jr., Esther, Rose), but what the women say or do is more intriguing than what is supplied by Lon, Jr. While he acts mainly as the dance caller (thereby "cueing" or arranging the shape of the proceedings), fickle Rose tries on and rejects one dancer after another while Esther sings about having fun no matter "what my friends say."

Significantly while Lon, Jr. places himself in the traditional male role, the women show or voice an agency which denotes that they are the ones truly in control. In "Under the Bamboo Tree" it is the females who "perform" heterosexuality, and of all the numbers it is this one which best realizes the complementary harmony being sought. The heterosexual aspect of the number (it is about two African lovers) is stressed by its location in front of the dinner table-- the site associated with conflict as well as resolution between men and women in the film. But due to the separate homosocial worlds of male and female that the narrative outlines, heterosexuality is not being emulated by Esther and Tootie as much as it is being practiced for. Given the musical's strict division it is logical that males and females would have a greater ease among themselves than with one another.

As adroitly as Minnelli conveyed the lingering dissatisfaction felt in Esther's solos, in these numbers he just as expertly constructs the sense of an "innate" conjunction between men and women (literally in "Skip to My Lou" and one imagined in "Under the Bamboo Tree"). Employing an assortment of mobile tracking shots and swooping overhead craning to photograph the intricate choreography of "Skip to My Lou," the technical, even musical, finesse of the camera work seems invisible because it never calls attention to itself. This filmic strategy aids in facilitating the idea of a "naturally" intuned feeling between the genders. In "Under the Bamboo Tree" this effect is created by keeping Esther and Tootie in a two-shot (either in a long shot or medium close-up) thus emphasizing their utter compatibility with one another. But to hide the professional quality of these numbers, characters are seen making "mistakes" which give these songs an aura of unrehearsed freshness (for example, the hapless trumpet player who falls down at the end in the former; the way the sisters turn in opposite directions at the start of the "vamp" portion of the number in the latter). Such calculated imperfections further put across the "ordinariness" of this heterosexual model.

Just as much as "Skip to My Lou" and "Under the Bamboo Tree" set out to show the "inherent" character of complementary love between men and women, and "Over the Bannister" depicts the beginning of this relational process, so does "You and I" reveal such ardour at a further stage. Rare for a Hollywood musical, "You and I" is a hymn to middle-aged, married love. Performed between Mr. and Mrs. Smith and movingly played by Leon Ames and Mary Astor, the song serves to heal the split between the two (and hence between Mr. Smith and the family) after his announcement about the move. The feelings expressed through the words in this number reaffirm and make personal the committed love between Alonzo and Anna Smith. Just as crucially, it provides the musical incorporation of the usually estranged father and husband (near the beginning of the song she adjusts the key from a higher, more feminine register to a lower, more masculine one). As Mr. Smith sings (the only time in this musical in which a man's contribution is considerable and vital), "You and I/Together/Forever/You and I."

Though the two singers are stationary throughout the number (she is seated playing the piano as he stands singing next to her), the way this arrangement is filmed is no less important than the others described. It

begins with a medium shot on the couple and ends with an even more intimate medium close-up of them. But it is only after the number has begun and the singing has attracted the other members of the family, that the camera's depth of field is appreciated. As Mr. and Mrs. Smith perform in the foreground, the other Smiths (and Katie) return downstairs to their dessert and take their chairs. At the emotional climax of "You and I" as the pair come to the two-part harmony close of the song, they are shown in complementary side-by-side deep focus shots. Filmed at a left angle, one frames Grandpa, Agnes, Katie, and Rose in a half-circle seated in back of the singers while in the other, the angle is from the right and its *mise-en-scène* similarly includes Esther and Tootie behind their folks. Having reestablished the loving cross ties among the family members, the number ends as it had started: as a romantic ballad between two longtime lovers.

When Mrs. Smith had said to her husband moments before the song, "If you think it's best to go away [to New York City], why, that's what we'll do," her deference towards him is an acknowledgment of his role as the family's monetary provider. This scene echoes the earlier episode wherein Mr. Smith had given in and allowed Rose to answer the phone. There he had acceded

his authority in recognition of the women's nurturing function. Like the four seasons within which the film is set, both incidents occur in a context (that of eating) that "naturalizes" the situation. (This structural device suggests that while the film's happy resolution was "inevitable," so were its basic difficulties.) Yet later on when Mr. Smith observes Tootie's disturbing destruction of the snow people, her behaviour alarms him enough to reconsider if the move is actually in the family's best interest. His subsequent change of mind seems not so much another capitulation on his part as it is the wider awareness that relational values undergird economic ones. This leads to his implicit reappraisal of the common good in the family and to his function as a nurturer.

This breakthrough takes place after he sits down to mull over the hysterical scene outside he has witnessed, and begins to fire up his cigar. Here "the lighting of the match illuminates the whole screen, and its flame is simultaneous with, and symbolic of, Smith's change of mind: the family will stay in St. Louis."¹⁰⁴ This action is worth identifying because of the way it stands for a crucial "ignition" of consciousness. This motif is sometimes found in other Minnelli musicals as, for example, in *Yolanda and the Thief* (in which the real

identity of Leon Ames becomes known to Fred Astaire as Ames lights his cigar) and, in a sarcastic vein, in *The Band Wagon* (where Astaire hands two men "exploding cigars" after they recognize him). But in *Meet Me in St. Louis* this activity is significant due to the manner it subtly suggests levels of individuation within the men's maturation process. In looking at John, Mr. Smith, and Grandpa, the film presents this developmental arc: John's absorption with his unlit pipe blinds him to the attentions of Esther and Rose, thereby isolating him; Mr. Smith's decision to sit down and light his cigar occurs just as he experiences a burst of awareness as to the genuine needs of the family, thereby keeping the household whole and undivided; and, Grandpa (Harry Davenport), who, seen enjoying his lit pipe in areas throughout the narrative, is permitted an agency that allows him to reside comfortably within both gender realms. In this way, Grandpa is positioned as an "enlightened" figure who offers a way through the gender impasse shown in the film. One supposes he has this status because of once being in Mr. Smith's shoes together with his retirement at home with the women.

In conclusion, Mr. Smith's rethinking of his role indicates the contingent nature of complementary arrangements. A more intense example of this occurs in

the preceding "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" number. What causes Tootie's breakdown after Esther's singing is that, despite outward assurances and the lyrics of the song ("Have yourself a merry little Christmas, let your heart be light"), Esther does not see an answer to their situation. Earlier she had accepted John's proposal of marriage even though she had known that the family will leave St. Louis in a few days. Will Esther stay with John or marry him later after settling in New York City? What of John's university plans? Will he really drop them or wait until after graduation to marry Esther? Having consented to John as well as to the move, Esther is in a chaotic situation and, astonishingly for her, seems to have given herself over to the unknown. But Tootie, in a reversal as remarkable, craves order and stability and so cannot grapple with the thought of complete upheaval. She correctly senses the hopeful rather than assured tone of her older sister's rendition of the song, and is made to face a deeper fear: adulthood. "Time and death, which have preoccupied Tootie from the beginning, have acquired new meaning."¹⁰⁵ Thus it is the same sequence in which Esther and Tootie switch their usual roles that leads Mr. Smith to enlarge his. In the concluding Spring segment, the family has the unity they have sought (Rose, Esther, and Lon, Jr. engaged or

married, the family remaining in St. Louis). Just as *Meet Me in St. Louis* shows that, however difficult, heterosexual males and females can be made to complete one another, it also reveals that each gender must be expansive enough to maintain and express its "opposite." It is what the women have known all along, and it is only with such elasticity that harmony is realized.

END NOTES

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78. Serafina Bathrick, "The Past as Future: Family and the American Home in *Meet Me in St. Louis*" in *The Minnesota Review*, New Series 6, Spring 1976, pp. 135-36.
79. Contemporary research has shown that this model has rarely, if ever, been the predominant one. It cannot be said to act as the traditional model, except in the sense that it has long formed the cultural standard held throughout US thought and culture. See: Stephanie Coontz, The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (New York: Basic, 1992).
80. Rick Altman, The American Film Musical (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1989), p. 78.
81. Quoted in Andrew Britton, "Meet Me in St. Louis: Smith, or the Ambiguities" in CineAction, No. 35, Fall, 1994.
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84. Robert H. Hopcke, Men's Dreams, Men's Healing (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), p. 53.
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93. Richard Dyer, Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society (London: BFI Publishing, 1986), p. 162.
94. Ibid., p. 163.
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96. Ibid., p. 31.
97. Stephen Harvey, Directed by Vincente Minnelli (New York: The Museum of Modern Art/Harper & Row, 1989), p. 50.
98. Nietzsche, p. 33.
99. Altman, p. 314.
100. Naremore, p. 85.
101. Allan Megill, Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 47.
102. Britton, p. 35.
103. Bathrick, p. 138.
104. Britton, pp. 35-36, Bathrick, pp. 136-37, and in a wider way as a motif in Minnelli's films, Elsaesser, p. 221.
105. Kaufman, p. 49.
106. Naremore, p. 88.

Chapter 5
The Pirate: The Artistry of Eros

Introduction

In looking at *The Pirate* I will analyse the function of eros as the creative impulse leading to self-fulfillment. According to Jacob Needleman, eros has enjoyed a cosmological position in many traditions of Western thought as the very power that facilitates the movement toward meaning.¹⁰⁶ Such a propulsion midwives, as Diotima tells Socrates in Plato's Symposium, the qualities of goodness and beauty¹⁰⁷-- traits that to the Hellenistic mind were the basis of the Forms underlying art and identity. Thus within the vital workings of eros, the individual is not viewed as an entity cut off from vision and enterprise. Instead, the self is deemed to have a "natural" access to, and indeed a pull toward, an almost infinite field of artistic possibilities and hence to new gestalts. All discourses on the topic agree as to its expansive properties, but whether the actual expression of romantic love detracts from, or is crucial to, the activity of eros has long been a source of contention. Vincente Minnelli's hyper-stylish 1948 musical epitomizes the latter view, and as such, what I will examine in this chapter are the ways in which libidinous love is aligned with the imagination as the main agent of transformation.

The Pirate concerns the power of the erotic and its link to the artistic drive and the development of personality. Before delving into the film's exploration of eros, delineating the competing notions within this idealist framework will help to elucidate Minnelli's playful handling of it. For simplicity's sake, I will call one approach to eros the ascetic position while the other I will designate the aesthetic approach. The first one is governed by the supposition that the location of meaning is exclusive of sexual love. This attitude comes from the view that the individual must endeavour, as much as possible, to transcend, expel, or (at its most permissive) limit such feeling. Undergirding orthodox versions of Christianity (St. Paul, the Church Fathers, Calvin) and some of its heretical expressions (Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Jansenism), physical love is seen as morally unclean and contrary to salvation. The secular counterpart to this attitude is found in psychoanalysis where sexuality is sublimated toward personal creativity and the collective project of civilization. Meanwhile displacing physical love in favour of an imperial rationality has a long pedigree (traceable to Hesiod) but achieved a paradigmatic status in Descartes and Kant, each of whom held that affectivity and sexual libido undermine the intellect. Finally, since women are expected to fulfil

a nurturing function, such expressivity is filtered through a larger resignation that romantic love is curbed within certain limits or outcomes (as in the "don't-let's-ask-for-the-moon-we-have-the-stars"

temperament that surrounds the Hollywood women's picture). Therefore, in spite of their different aims each outlook forms part of a metaphysic of eros, which, because sensuality is stigmatized, forge the basis of both puritanism and pornography. Though it goes against its gender assumptions by using a woman to represent this particular view, there is perhaps no more lucid example of this in cinema than Luis Buñuel's 1967 *Belle de Jour*. In it, Catherine Deneuve's bored housewife is shown as unable to experience love and sex simultaneously. This division leads her to a schizophrenic juxtaposition of opposed identities: the first as a frigid, but loving wife; the other, in secret, as a loveless prostitute. While discovery and transmission of meaning does occur in this category of eros, its split of creative energy circumscribes such opportunities.

In contrast, aesthetic eros is premised on the idea that meaning is a synergistic striving which involves all aspects of the body (emotional, mental, spiritual, and sexual). Just as the ascetic mindset is known by the

polarities it arranges, the aesthetic one is signified by the connections it claims to detect. Here the artistic drive and development of personality are advanced by addition and integration instead of by subtraction and partition. It is neatly encapsulated in Oscar Wilde's aphorism, "Those who see any difference between the soul and the body have neither." In this second form of eros "the urge to merge" (in every sense) is paradoxically seen as seminal to creativity and to attaining the deepest degree of meaning-- individuation.

This sensibility pervades, for example, the tantric Song of Songs. Both the theme and sense imagery of this Old Testament book revolve around the sacredness of erotic play, and as such isolate it as the lone biblical text where its author(s) never felt compelled to mention the Divine. Likewise artist and activist Audre Lorde refused to compartmentalize the conjunctive power of the erotic, saying that she experienced it in a variety of activities including "dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea."¹⁰⁸ And in contrast to *Belle de Jour*, many of the films of Frank Borzage (*Seventh Heaven* [1927], *Street Angel* and *The River* [both 1928], *History is Made at Night* [1937]) portray erotic love as that which leads to the art of true living and holy union with another. As Kent Jones writes,

Borzage's cinema is sexual, to be sure, but sex is never an end in itself, nor is it a prelude to the bourgeois stability of home and hearth; it is a spiritual act that raises the lovers to the heavens.¹⁰⁹

Such different formulations of eros rest on different assumptions concerning identity, the source(s) of awareness about the self, and the end(s) toward which the self is moving. Even though the ascetic version has a negative view of sexuality, it nonetheless shares with its aesthetic opposite a basic belief in passion, and therefore, in a relational approach to meaning. Understanding the characteristics of each model of eros is valuable because it allows one to discern relational topologies in heterosexual (or homosexual) contexts. The image of the map that literally opens *The Pirate* in the title sequence, and the one that dominates the bedroom of its protagonist Manuela, make it clear that the film is centrally about geography. As with Minnelli's earlier *Yolanda and the Thief*, this musical is set in "some uncharted torrid zone Shangri-La, whose stucco and cobblestone are as triumphantly fake as the sun streaming down the sound-stage rafters."¹¹⁰ The real terrain here is states of mind, and as a result, states of being: the assorted landscape of heterosexual identity and arrangements.

To stress that its heroine's adventure odyssey is more actually a psychological or relational one (this despite the promise of high seas action suggested in the title), not a moment of the musical takes place on anything but dry land. However this is not to deny that *The Pirate* is something of an actioner. This is because as Manuela moves from ascetic to aesthetic types of eros, she upsets fixed norms and eventually finds satisfaction in a way that pushes her past convention-- and into liberatory modes of heterosexuality. As she evolves to ever wider realizations of eros, she unleashes her own repressed artistry. In the process, she achieves the goal of all aesthetes by becoming both artist and living work of art.

Having completed a broad outline of eros, I will study in Part I how this specific energy arranges heterosexual identity and love in *The Pirate*. Here I will explore the way it embraces and then expands principal features of the fairy tale musical related to the construction of sex and gender so as to link individuation to boldness and imagination. I will also examine the paradox the film puts forth wherein artifice is seen as vital for converting dreams into reality. In the context of music and dance, certain modes of counter-realism (trance, acting, and dream) are employed as forms of theatrical

cathexis which permit Manuela to get in touch with her own artistry. Because of the circumscribed nature of ascetic eros and the boundless one of its aesthetic opposite, each energy model is visually conveyed, respectively, by means of obstruction or freedom of movement. Pivotal to the musical, the use of movement in the film is the major focus of my analysis in the first part. In Part II, the aspects of illusion or pretense as related to expositions of gender and sexuality are examined. Scholars led by Richard Dyer posit that the view of gender and sexuality as consisting of masquerade is the one which informs the film. As a result, I will trace to what extent identity is seen as role playing. Lastly, I will look at how Cole Porter's lyrics and the film's representation of the body show a model of heterosexual love that moves from an oedipalized construction to an entirely non-phallogentric one.

Part I

Ravishing the Sensibilities

The Pirate was an expensive box office misfire and gathered less than enthusiastic reviews at the time of its release. Although it starred Judy Garland and Gene Kelly, audiences and critics were not engaged by its unrelenting artifice and deliberate tongue-in-cheek

acting. As a result, other Minnelli musicals-- *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *An American in Paris*, *The Band Wagon*, and *Gigi* --have popularly overshadowed *The Pirate*. Yet the qualities that put off many people in 1948 are the ones now attracting some to it. In recent years Minnelli's film has been rediscovered by various academic groups: postmodernists because of its flamboyant though depthless aesthetic; feminists because of its nominalist view of gender and sexuality as performatory and fluid; and gays and lesbians because of its sustained campiness. (It may be argued that contemporary women's studies and gay/lesbian studies cannot be readily separated from the postmodern project, and are in fact part of it.) In my analysis of *The Pirate* I will examine each of these important aspects. But I will argue that the film's major impetus is not so much a proto-postmodernist, feminist, or queer one (though they are all certainly present), as much as it is a product of developments in the Hollywood musical since its birth with the coming of sound.

Altman writes that with the coming of sound three types of "fairy tale" musical arose in Hollywood. The first one he calls the "sex as sex" variety, the best example being the surprisingly risqué Maurice Chevalier-Jeanette MacDonald musicals. The second type he labels as "sex

as battle" and includes the Astaire-Rogers series. Common to both (or at least to the better quality films of either category) was that they were clearly aimed toward sophisticated audiences. Such musicals "abound in distantiating devices designed to remind and reassure the audience of their sophistication," and these items range from "in-jokes, innuendo, and impertinent rhymes to intertextuality, implicit irony, and impish into-the-camera winks."¹¹¹ He says that the emphasis on sex reflected the musical film genre's reaction to the sexually repressed melodrama of the early century. Since World War I, Altman notes that virtue was made to look so boring that interest in the more colourful villain emerged. By the Twenties, male protagonists associated with qualities like danger, violence, amorality, and foreignness became popular, and none more so than Rudolph Valentino. In a figure like Valentino, and later in the third type of fairy tale musical (those that Altman terms "sex as adventure"), what is constructed is a "syntactic bond between the spectator's overt fascination with unknown lands and that same spectator's unavowed but intense interest in the uncharted seas of sexuality."¹¹² Of all the types of fairy tale musical, the spectator here is more likely to be a woman. This is because by having the male protagonist encoded with transgressive traits, women in

both the film and in the audience are permitted a safe means of projecting otherwise censored desires:

The sin of illicit desire is thus erased from the woman's slate and attributed to the man-- as it is throughout the Beauty and the Beast tradition. Far from having sexual yearnings herself, she is apparently carried off by a bandit who forces his attention on her. He is the one to blame, not she.¹¹³

The Pirate operates within these dynamics of the sex-as-adventure fairy tale musical, but undermines them in a manner that openly, instead of surreptitiously, leads to the desire of men and women being championed. The freeing of the erotic imagination not only liberates Manuela and the "ruffian" Serafin, but permits them to restore the social order of the film through the artistry each of them has acquired through desire.

In this way, *The Pirate* reverses the reactionary line of romantic development so often the case between men and women in Hollywood musicals. This is the pattern, already examined in *Top Hat*, in which the woman is introduced as being her own person but slowly cedes her agency and liberty (as opposed to the man whose power increases) during the course of romance. In complete contrast, Minnelli's musical opens with Manuela placing

herself in drastic positions of dependency on men (in desiring Macoco to enslave her and in consenting to marry Don Pedro), but coming to enjoy an equal relationship-- truly a partnership --with Serafin by its close. Near the start of the film Manuela berates a peer's modest ambitions ("I do wish you were a bit more spiritual!"), and though she hopes for but does not expect it, her dream of a lover who will fulfil her does take place. Through Serafin (in Spanish "seraphim"), she will not only have her wishes granted, but in finally being able to express herself erotically will come to experience mutual love and freedom. From this, she will find release from the collective closet of creative repression. This facet is the film's most inclusively Romantic aspect as well as being a specifically feminist (and suggestively homosexual) one.

In a musical so directed toward deliverance through movement, the degree to which the physical actions of its principal characters are efficacious and unrestrained are indicative of each one's individuation.

Possession or lack of personal power, choice, and artistry are the movie's clearest signifiers of self-realization, and the way in which each figure is framed by the *mise-en-scène*, travels through its space, and relates to other people or items within it, reveal that

character's range of volition. No filmic aspect communicates more or better suggests each character's view of eros than this means of construction. Likewise it conveys the content and design of romantic relations, showing the way Manuela moves from Barbara Cartland ascetic eros (which the "real" Don Pedro and the "legendary" Macoco represent in relation to her) to the Jane Austen version (which Serafin offers to her in his role as Macoco), and then to New Woman model (which Serafin offers to her as himself). The association of agency with individuation-- and conversely, stasis with enfeeblement --is so crucial to *The Pirate*, that what follows in my analysis of its orchestration of heterosexuality will come from looking at its characters through these rival patterns.

Don Pedro ("the richest man on the island") enters the narrative exhibiting, in a few significant ways, considerable volition. On top of his wealth and official stature in the community, his body size (with his imposing height and weight) confers upon him an air of regency. Taken together these traits permit the somewhat impatient mayor a social authority to traverse easily through the frame. As a man of prestige he comes into the story being waited upon and attended to: rich carriages transport him, doors open automatically,

cigars are proffered, and Manuela, his bride-to-be (whom he has bought and paid for), is ushered in before him. Just as he has the power to command events he has the power to nullify them. The latter is seen when he crushes Manuela's cherished wish to leave her West Indies village ("this little saucer in the hills"), and experience excitement overseas ("Paris! To see Paris! All my life I've dreamed of that."). Employing a variety of filmic contrasts, the first scene they share - that of their betrothal set within the captivating antechamber of Aunt Inez's house --shows the differences between them.

Most of the sequence takes place around the room's central table, and once Judy Garland's Manuela and Walter Slezak's Don Pedro are seated, the couple is photographed in medium shot/reverse shots rather than in a (series of) single two-shot(s). Staging them this way emphasizes their separateness, but what surrounds them in their respective frames, the angle they are filmed from, and even the clothes they wear, divulge as much about the characters as the power they possess. Don Pedro sits firmly in the middle of the frame and his body, from his cummerbund upwards, fills the better part of the screen. Because he sits at a 10-degree angle he almost appears to look directly at the viewer, and his

near direct gaze reinforces his firm sense of command. His hands rest authoritatively on the arms of his chair, while behind him, one on either side equidistant to the other, stand a room screen and a cabinet. Here the browns and vertical bearing of the furniture convey a flat strength and solidity. His outfit, too, exude the qualities of confidence and nobility (wide lapels, extra padding, and frills-- all very Spanish). At the same time, the shots of Manuela are notably unlike those of her husband-to-be. In them, the *mise-en-scène* simultaneously subdues and accentuates her even as the high angle photography devalues her. She shares the frame with Aunt Inez (Gladys Cooper), who, because of her matchmaker's standing position and grand apparel, reduces her to a quarter of the screen (its southeast corner). Unlit gas lamps hover above her in the background, as well as a fascinating wall-window made of grilled wood that forms a myriad of intersecting squares. Yet while these items diminish her physical stature, they also place her in a space marked by arresting textures and intense colours.

If consistency of fashion and evenness of pigmentation mark Don Pedro's shots, then the opposite is found in those of Manuela. More than anything, this is observed in the attire worn by the two women. While Manuela and

Aunt Inez are featured in garments that have period leg-of-mutton sleeves, the latter is fitted with an outrageous bombazine dress and ornate top hat and veil, while the former has on a yellow, pleasant-style chintz frock and, of all things, a red tartan beret. The black-green velvety fabric of what Aunt Inez has on brings out the colour of Manuela's clothes, and vice-versa. Moreover, unlike Don Pedro, Manuela is broadly lit and this augments her youth and zest. However the camera is placed higher in her shots than in those of her fiancé so that she is photographed from her bustline, not her waistline, up. In addition, Manuela also looks away from the spectator at a greater angle (about 45 degrees), and these placements make her seem less substantial. Still, she is constructed so as to link her to the qualities of imagination and vivaciousness while the same filmic devices connect Don Pedro to properties that suggest control and tediousness. Yet it is Aunt Inez, her sympathy directed toward her niece (this comes through not only in her expressive facial inflections but in the tight two-shot they share), who acts as Manuela's register of feeling.

It is her garb that, symbolically, seems evocative of Manuela's emotional situation: a combination of the funereal and ridiculous.

Yet the attributes that give Don Pedro his power and agency (his physical bulk, social rank, and money) are the very things that enervate him. For instance, his stoutness only underscores the inelegance of the ostentatious, matador-style bow (with its bad "fancy" footwork) he performs as he greets first Aunt Inez and then Manuela. However it is gravity of a different sort, that of keeping secret his rapine past (the source of his riches), which places the greatest constraints on his volition. Even before the viewer learns of his true identity, Don Pedro is introduced in a manner that already aligns him with restriction and nonmovement. This happens when he informs his future wife that neither of them will ever leave the island. "Home," he says in a decided tone, "is the perfect spot. So quiet, so peaceful, so safe." (His words dispirit Manuela, and her reaction goes against the view of home that was so much a part of Garland's persona-- her presence in the Andy Hardy series, Victor Fleming's 1939 *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Meet Me in St. Louis*. As the "ordinary" American "girl-next-door," this prime element of her screen image is one of many that *The Pirate* knowingly reverses and pastiches. More on this aspect later.)

He wants to extend his inertia to her, and in so doing requires that she be reduced to the level of object

little different than the lace-bordered silhouette portrait he later has her pose for. "Too much soft living, Macoco," Kelly's Serafin will later say to him, thereby linking both of the *alcalde*'s disabling areas to the other. Comparing him to Serafin, Harvey says,

It's no accident that we first see Serafin the trouper climbing triumphantly aloft the shipping crate bearing Manuela's trousseau from the Old World; in this one shot, Minnelli establishes the free-spirited hero's supremacy over the seductive trappings which are the sum total of Don Pedro's appeal to Manuela."¹⁴

Yet Minnelli is a sensualist and much too taken with physical matter (filling his movie with sumptuous costumes, rococo décor, razzle-dazzle tints and colours) to vilify the love of earthly articles. If anything, it is Serafin who is a far more self-indulgent figure (as in the Don Juan-ish "Niña" number). Morally Minnelli does not seem to decry materialism per se, but judges whether love and attention given to objects are part of an overall imaginative expression of eros. Again he reveals himself to be an aesthete, not an ascetic, with aestheticism of this kind laying predicate to strength and mobility. It is the end toward which matter is used (limitation/immobilisation as opposed to enlargement/

activity) that comprises the difference between Don Pedro and Serafin. However, because the film's conceit involves the elaborate role-playing that each man does in order to attract Manuela, other contrasts between them are established. After Don Pedro is introduced into the narrative via the aforementioned betrothal scene, back-to-back scenes introduce the actor Serafin.

It is the second of these dual entrances, that of the tour-de-force "Niña" number, which exhibits the characteristics uniting and dividing Manuela's competing admirers.

Parallels between pirating and performing are expressed in many areas throughout the film, and not only in the manner Don Pedro and especially Serafin are introduced.

But when, for example, Serafin asks Manuela to join his troupe, her derisive description of a travelling player's life could be equally that of a pirate: ". . .to live as a vagabond, to go hungry, to be chased out of every town, to be looked down upon by all decent people." It is a grandiose sense of self, however, where the two vocations (and men) fully intersect. As an actor Serafin offers imagination, and his robust movements--ones that carry him to every section within the frame --exemplify his fictive ability to transform the ordinary. But this agency is a threat to Don Pedro

who must do the opposite, namely, cover up his exciting past through a social respectability that demands he lead a banal life. Tellingly, his increasingly hindered movements reflect his forcefully repressed imagination.

Thus, of the two antagonists it is only Serafin who realizes his desires. No part of the movie better displays his rollicking brashness than his dance-acrobatics in the "Niña" routine. Displaying an ebullient Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.-style athleticism, he changes eighteenth century Port Sebastian into a sexual playground-- even using its architecture as an aid to seduction. Inasmuch as Don Pedro comes off as vain or misguided to believe that he can buy love, Serafin is regarded as cocky but correct to expect that women are drawn to his bravura sensuality.

"Niña," the first number in *The Pirate*, shows the lusty Serafin not as a bloody raider of Caribbean cities but as a conqueror of women. From creamy virgins with swatting *duennas* to smoldering flirts, he capers with a steady string of attractive young women who turn the main avenue of the port into a male heterosexual's happy hunting ground. Serafin's aggressive singing and dancing reveal a sailor-like mock epic promiscuity. At the same time the number allows him to exhibit, on the one hand, a muscularity and agile prowess, and on the

other, the independence of a libertine. Through it all (and underscored at the end as he stands next to a poster of himself), the rakish "star, juggler, conjurer, dancer, and singer of songs" is shown to be a solipsist, who, played by Kelly with a hammy self-absorption, recalls the heel-hero of his film debut, *For Me and My Gal* (Berkeley, 1942). "Niña" is an ersatz-Latin American style number visually and melodically. Divided into an acrobatic and singing portion (the lyrics are his pickup lines) followed by a dance-filled second half (flamenco struts mixed with swashbuckling leaps and twirls), here Kelly's relation to the world reveals a sublime ease with the tropical port's landscape and women. He demonstrates a resourcefulness, a cinematic grace, that transforms his physical environment into an extension of self and an expression of his will.

As with Astaire in *Top Hat*, Kelly also possesses an "ontological equality" with the world. Yet the difference between them is the explicit way "Niña" shows how such a relationship with the world places Kelly in a prevailing category over others. At the same time Kelly exudes charm in this number, but it is never one that tries to pretend it is something other than "romancy." Both "No Strings" and "Niña" are illustrations of the freedom enjoyed, respectively, by the Astaire and Kelly

characters. However, the numbers disclose a counter aspect operating behind them. This is shown in how each man is dependent on love for his liberty and well-being.

To be sure, Astaire uses his passion for dance as a cheeky lure to the Rogers character while Kelly's zeal for gymnastics is his extravagant way of wooing women. But no matter how playful the first one passes off his behaviour as being or how sportive the second one is in beguiling the opposite gender, it is the impressive force of energy both figures exert and commit to their endeavours that bespeaks of a deeper dimension. Importantly, this dimension is realized by the Kelly character in *The Pirate* but never so by Astaire's imperially self-contained Travers in *Top Hat*. This is the aspect, namely, wherein the activity in which they find their self expression is ultimately shown to be incomplete on its own. What I mean is the idea of individuality being considered a relational process, something akin to Hegel's concept of self-consciousness: "Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that, it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or 'recognized.'" ¹¹⁵

The US musical has been a remarkable, often thrilling, genre in depicting the exhilaration of self. But it has

done so as part of a larger scheme of societal transformation founded upon, or modeled after, the central heterosexual couple (whether or not the woman's identity is lost to the man). As Leo Braudy says, the Hollywood musical has done this by making,

the perfect couple the centre of an ideal community created by dance, a world of harmony where everyone on the street not only sympathizes with the exuberance you feel because you're in love, but also knows all the words and dance steps that express your feelings.¹¹⁶

Romantic love releases and amplifies this energy, and without it one is incomplete. This is acknowledged in *Top Hat* when Astaire calls his dancing an "affliction" before he consumes Rogers; in *The Pirate* this is stressed by Kelly in his singing as he equates succumbing to madness to the loss of love. His words in "Niña" might simply be read as a "come-on" (and on one level they certainly are), except that the intensity with which he gyrates with the quartet of women on the stage, and later, his tenacious love toward Manuela suggest something more.

Fascinating Niña, what a lovely child.
 Niña, you enchant me, Niña
 You're so sweet, I mean ya, fairly drive me
 wild.
 Niña, 'til the moment you hit my heart
 Niña, I was doin' just fine.
 But since I've seen ya-- Niña, Niña, Niña -
 I'll be having neurasthenia til I make you
 mine. .

Niña, you're the prized gardenia of the
 SpanishMain,
 Niña, don't be so enticing or I'll go insane.
 Niña, 'til at last I gazed in your eyes
 Niña, I was mentally fine.
 But since I've seen ya
 I'll be having schizophrenia till I make you
 mine.

By any standard, risking one's sanity for the sake of passion and self-expansion is an extreme gamble but what is the alternative? In *The Pirate* it is a subjugated life, living which coerces or is the object of coercion.

As examples of the first, Don Pedro and Aunt Inez lord over Manuela and Capucho (Lester Allen), both of whom represent the second. Don Pedro's attempts at control have a "masculine" directness, while Aunt Inez applies a "womanly" approach that relies on shrewd manipulation. That they are two of a kind is underlined during the last part of the film when they are the only ones who try to disrupt Serafin's show before the Viceroy (George

Zucco). Perhaps because they cannot fully be themselves, they deny expressivity to Manuela and Capucho (Don Pedro as a result of his past; Aunt Inez because she suggests the logical outcome of the family situation seen in *Meet Me in St. Louis* wherein women triumph over men, but "the palm of victory is their own entrapment with their castrated men, inside patriarchal institutions."¹⁷). Seeking control for themselves (Don Pedro for a wife, Aunt Inez to get out of debt), they also exercise power for the benefit of others: Manuela to marry a rich man, Capucho to erase his gambling losses. (Besides, no matter how misguided their intentions there is no doubt that they care about Manuela.) Yet with their ever-diminishing agency, they, like all autocrats, are ultimately as much subjugated as subjugators. Neither one is positioned as a villain, but both come as close to being tragic characters as farce allows. Nonetheless they do inflict upon Manuela and Capucho an emotional asceticism so that she is left to her fantasies while he is left to his impotent cigars.

The force of Serafin's aesthetic eros disrupts the narrative. Repression is no match for imagination, and from the moment he enters Manuela's village the power of Don Pedro and Aunt Inez evaporates. The intensity of

this energy strikes a responsive cord in Manuela. Though their romance will pass through an important complementary stage, Serafin and Manuela are shown to be essentially alike. Each one will initiate in the other the transformative aspects needed to realize his or her roundness of character: he will effect her suppressed libido and artistry (but get in over his head), while she (despite her superego) will stir him to direct better his diffused energy. The relationship between them begins at a sea wall where he introduces himself to her. The sea wall which Manuela stands against as she looks out to the open water is a site suggestive of what Charles Affron would call a "threshold of feeling."¹¹⁸ Though this rampart lacks a door or a window's compositional frame, it nevertheless acts as a portal of the imaginary through which Manuela's acute longings are roused. As waves crash against the breakers in front of her, she seems possessed by the idea of high seas adventure and surging passion evoked and symbolized by the pounding surf. That her dreams carry the possibility of danger is signalled by the highly melodramatic music heard as she loses herself in what her gaze across the blue ocean has provoked. This threshold has considerable affect owing to the vital yet forbidden thoughts Manuela allows herself to be engulfed by and, in addition, to the knowledge that it is the

closest she will ever come to realizing these feelings and urges.

"You can make anything come true by wishing for it hard enough," Aunt Inez will say to her niece, and indeed *The Pirate* treats the power of wishing as a conjuration. Here Minnelli's movie treats desire or craving as a creative undertaking, the content of which magically enters, sooner or later, into the everyday (though not, importantly, in the form envisaged). With Serafin finding Manuela after looking for but not finding his ideal "niña," followed by Manuela abruptly meeting Serafin during her seaside reverie, the adage "wishing will make it so" sums up the film's main theme. Due to the degree of consciousness and complexity human beings enjoy, they are given a value which generally exceeds any item or space. Thus individuals (oftentimes lovers and/or teachers) may serve as exceptionally powerful doors of the imaginary. Starting with the scene along the sea wall, Serafin and Manuela will be thresholds for one another. As I have already signalled, their relationship will evolve to where they will not be two halves who form a whole (as in complementary models), but of two wholes who "affirm, enable, and reveal the inner nature of each to the other" (what Will Roscoe terms supplementary arrangements).¹¹⁹

Sharply unlike the other musicals examined in this thesis, *The Pirate* features a heterosexual couple whose bonds are founded on sameness not difference. After he sees her perform in "Mack the Black," Serafin realizes that they are similar and it becomes his task to make Manuela aware of this. It is challenging because she has given in to conformity rather than following the dictates of her imagination. What she must learn from Serafin is that there are two kinds of role playing: those which liberate (theatre) and those which oppress (rigid societal expectations). Though it constructs fiction, theatre may bring about individuation for it encourages experimentation and expressivity. This leads to the insight Jean Rouch has expressed, that one's fictional side is often one's most authentic side, that is, that the myths and dreams one entertains can reveal the most about one's identity.¹²⁰ A culture of self-discovery is what Manuela needs but will never get under the life ruled for her. Whether she will choose approbation and fear or courage and creativity forms the film's axial conflict.

Serafin embodies the idea that self and persona inform one another, and challenges Manuela to break away from patriarchal, bourgeois "living." Claiming at the sea wall to see that she has "depths of emotion, nomadic

longings, unfulfilled dreams," he correctly perceives her inner situation even as he uses this knowledge to solicit her love. He had seen her transported aloft in faraway absorption as she looked out over the sea, listened to responses that disclosed unintended dual meanings ("Aren't you interested in love?" "No, I'm going to be married."), and felt the nerve he tapped when he accused her of substituting daydreams for romance. Though at times he does obstruct her movement (running in front of her, using his cane to halt her steps, circling about her), it is the force of the truth she represses within her that prevents her fleeing from his advances (as in arguing for positions she does not believe, and being paralysed by the emotional truth of what he says). Even the elements teasingly conspire to highlight the tie between her sexual censorship and limited volition. This happens when a breeze blows her wide brimmed hat off her head as she turns to leave saying, "I shall remove the provocation [that is, "myself"]." To further underscore the weakness of her defenses, when Serafin retrieves the hat from a salty puddle it has landed in, it emerges floppy and unwearable.

In his simultaneous desire to possess and liberate her (and more ambiguously, his desire to have her as a lover

and as a sidekick in his act), it might seem that he is working at cross-purposes. However it is his arrogance ("The ego! The conceit!" Manuela will scream when he invades her bedroom on the day of her wedding trying to get her to change her mind), mixed with an utter faith in aesthetic eros, that sees his two aims as one. In short, he expects that by freeing her imagination her suppressed feelings for him will likewise surface. His strategy succeeds-- by the conclusion (in the "Be a Clown" coda) she is transformed into a lover and fellow artist --but Minnelli ensures that she is given the opportunity to deflate his presumption.

The first occasion happens when she learns that he is an imposter and lampoons his virility; the next when she vents her anger by hurling an entire roomful of objects at him for conning her; and the last (this one from a position of love and not of fury) when she saves him from hanging by feigning to be under his spell at the climax of his "gallows" performance. But she does something else for him: getting him to perfect his imperfect aesthetic eros. While he understands the relationship between libidinous love, invention, and artistry, his behaviour in "Niña" reveals an ascetic subject-object view of women instead of a subject-subject one. The first is a perspective founded on

hegemony and consumption, that is, values that scorn or shun intimacy (puritanical and pornographic ones). The second type is premised on equality and a kind of mutual transparency wherein each person is reflected in the other yet without the loss of either identity (erotic love). In "Nina" the women of Port Sebastian are made anonymous and patronized by Serafin who refers to them as "little girls." In explaining his method to two male onlookers Serafin sings, "When I arrive in any town, I look the ladies up and down/And when I pick my favourite flame, this is my patter no matter her name." It is significant therefore that when he meets Manuela the first thing he says is, "What is your name?" Consequently, Manuela will inspire in him a truer sense of freedom by concentrating his energy exclusively in her. The saving actions of each toward the other is the critical aspect of the complementary phase of their romance. Nonetheless, she has the furthest to develop and except for her retelling of the Macoco legend at the film's start, "Mack the Black" is the first time she is seen vocalizing her desire.

Stifling heat and a barker's broadcast bring the restless Manuela out of bed and into Serafin's audience.

In descending from her lodging to the amusement tent, she leaves the quotidian world of superego dichotomies

and demands and enters the substratal realm of id and show space. By fusing the sublime with the incredible, this fantasy arena disintegrates the resistant, socially erected boundaries which form the common and conventional. Here impulse and instinct reign and, as Raymond Durnat notes, such a carnival atmosphere can reveal not only a person's real nature but also indicate his or her destiny.¹²¹ Through what Serafin variously calls mesmerism, hypnosis, and (in keeping with his character) "animal magnetism," a spinning mirror is used to find out whether Manuela loves him (and to alter her will if she does not). But instead of being in love with him or pliant to his instructions, he unleashes in her a Pelée-like effusion he is not prepared for or able to control. In terms of character construction "Mack the Black" is the most startling sequence of *The Pirate*, and even for a Garland performance it is one of unexpected intensity.

In "Niña" both senses of libido (the exclusively sexual one and the wider artistic definition) are intertwined.

"Mack the Black" is another demonstration of this integrity, this time granting Manuela an expressivity and volition. Rather than being enclosed within constricting frames or bedecked *mise-en-scène*, there are moments when the scene is made to feel as if the camera

struggles to keep up with her movements just as it appeared to with Serafin during his dancing and philandering around Port Sebastian. Like him Manuela conquers her environment, using as well as creating stages to showcase her desire. A human vortex, she galvanizes what had been a lifeless crowd ("it's like a graveyard out there" an actor says before her appearance). By converting the internal audience into a chorus of singer-dancers Manuela usurps Serafin's command and erotic charge and makes it so it is she, not he, who is "mesmeric" and exudes an "animal magnetism."

But whereas his carnal exhibition had been willful, taking place during the light of day and in the middle of the port, hers occurs in a trance, transpires under the cover of night, and is enclosed in a setting marginal and surreal. As with the Rogers character in *Carefree*, she is permitted a libido only by not being responsible for it.

"Mack the Black" is a choreography of Manuela's libido come to life. After she enters the tent and trumpets announce Serafin as the show's "pinnacle of entertainment," she is placed in a medium close-up with her face level with the crotch of a man standing in the row above and next to her. They are the only details in the frame, and this two-shot is shown again as she

nervously watches Serafin begin his performance. Her face is apprehensive and one hand pulls her black cape tight about her neck. Tension between an urge to express her desire and a fear to keep these emotions "under wraps" is resolved when Serafin picks her out of the crowd by using his rotating mirror. This contraption (the word a fusion of "contrive" and "trap") has a dual significance: lulling her to an unself-conscious state, and then reflecting (in symbolic terms) facets of herself and hence latent possibilities. Not surprisingly, after she is hypnotized her erotic and artistic energies surface and explode. Unleashing an expressivity formerly limited to her story telling and an agency not associated with her, she grips the audience. In "Niña" Serafin had "woven together a kind of community of otherwise isolated individuals and objects through the catalyst of his own personality and artistry."¹²² Here Manuela likewise effects a dynamic interaction amongst those who had been passive spectators.

Once hypnotized Manuela goes from suspended animation (silent and catatonic-like) to a ferocious full-bodied eruption of singing and dancing. She begins under Serafin's control ("Come, come, my Serafin-ess") and he succeeds in extracting her name and address. What

brings her to life and liberates her from his power is his investigation into, and attempted manipulation of, her repressed sexual will and imagination. Manuela's inflamed behaviour is, in part, a reaction against having her aims and identity constantly described to and for her by others for their own purposes ("Don't call me 'pure soul,'" she demands, "it irritates me."). Mostly, though, her vehemence is the release of pent-up libido bestirred by his hapless exploitation. From the moment Manuela throatily declares her passion for Macoco, her expressivity/agency commence and quickly soar. While remaining thoroughly sexual, her libido acquires a musical dimension when words fall short of conveying the intensity of her carnality. This happens after she repeats relentlessly, "Underneath this prim exterior there are depths of emotion, nomadic longings" with a fervour ending with Macoco's name moaned in ecstasy. Her crescendo transfers to the literal category of song as she breaks out into "Mack the Black." The medium of music (one that expands to include dance) is shown to be redolent of the immanent yet transcendental experience of sexual feeling; showcasing her passion in this way turns it into spectacle. An enjoyment of her body accompanies her delirious looseness of limb: her hair comes down and with it inhibition.

Manuela shakes and shimmies with feeling and in a quiet moment as she sits singing in close-up, one of her hands quivers near her throat with the intensity of emotion heard in her vibrato voice (reversing the shots where prior to being mesmerized a hand acted to suppress sensation). In this way, she goes from submission and repressive lonesomeness to voracious appetite and shattering *jouissance*. Thoroughly disrupting Serafin's plans (but cutaway shots show him awed by her transformation), the crowd encircles her as if to become part of a *mise-en-scène* that frames Manuela's artistry so as to accent the artwork she is or is becoming.

Like all of *The Pirate*, the number is over-the-top, stuffed with campy humour (deadpan, she declares "Someday he'll swoop upon me like a chicken hawk and carry me away"), and "Freudian" touches (the open chest "as" female sexuality, for example). The release of Manuela's hidden vitality is not unexpected, but its unnerving intensity is. The force of her libido bestows on her a crazed fervidness beneath her commanding volition, one that has the crowd attending to her every word and gesture. Manuela's fixed attention to her desire accounts for the sequence's high pitched tenor. Her passion subjugated no longer, the fire of torches and footlights play up her incendiary feeling while the

camera is at times made to feel challenged to keep up with her fiery mobility.

This self-absorption allows her to birth herself, overriding the nullifying aspect in "Mack the Black" in which she lives solely for Macoco's pleasure ("And I shall do his bidding, I shall follow him-- yea 'til the ends of the world I shall follow him"). If Serafin regards women as objects in "Niña," Manuela does the same here by projecting onto a fantasy figure (a person who is neither Serafin nor Don Juan) her desires. Yet the context in which she does this (as a breakthrough expression of imagination) alters the meaning of her actions in comparison to Serafin's in his number. Freeing her imagination, such expressivity permits Manuela to realize a creativity beyond limits.

Part II

The Artful Life

Early on, after her betrothal to Don Pedro, Manuela assures Aunt Inez of her own maturity and level-headedness. "I realize that there is a practical world and a dream world. I know which is which. I shan't mix them." But invariably Manuela does mix them till at last she realizes that reality can subtend fantasy just as illusion may carry substance. *The Pirate* sustains

this theme of the interplay of the real and imaginary throughout, and as I examined in Part I this interplay even defines the construction of its three main characters. In Part II, I will further explore the real and the imaginary as they interrelate to form more evolved expressions of heterosexual identity and amatory designs in Minnelli's musical. But as Manuela and Serafin progress from the inequalities of the Barbara Cartland model (seen in "Niña" and "Mack the Black") to those of the equalitarian complementary and supplementary types, the connection between art, equality, and romance must be again stressed. To do this I will examine *An American In Paris* (1951), another Minnelli musical but one which, as Andrew Sarris says, is "curiously depressing."¹²³ As an artist in it proclaims, "to be in love is to be alive." Yet in contrast to the construction of gender seen in *The Pirate*, its treatment of its female characters undercuts, rather than represents, the otherwise elegant orchestration of aesthetic eros. In both films the theme is the same (individuation as an achievement of romance ending in art), but looking at the manner *An American in Paris* fatally undermines the promise of its subject matter allows one to understand better why *The Pirate* triumphs.

An American in Paris centres on an ex-G.I., Jerry Mulligan (Gene Kelly), who remains in the French capital after the Second World War to pursue his dream of being a painter. Success eludes him, as it does to his best friend and fellow expatriate, Adam Cook (Oscar Levant), who aspires to become a world-class composer. Jerry's fortunes change one day when he meets Milo Roberts (Nina Foch), a wealthy US heiress who takes a decided "interest" in his work and wants to sponsor him. His luck swells when he catches sight of the girl of his dreams, Lise Bourvier (Leslie Caron). Unbeknownst to the impassioned Jerry, Lise is engaged to singing star Henri Baurel (Georges Guetary), a recent pal of his and the man to whom she owes her life. Still, Jerry's dogged persistence breaks her reserve and she agrees to see him. As her feelings increasingly match his, their relationship turns into the musical's focal one.

Importantly, their love becomes the means by which Jerry finally acquires his true artistry. What is unique about Jerry is that despite being surrounded by those who create or collect art, only he will come to merge self into art and art into self-- a desire that each character (except Lise) aspires toward. Thus the main facet of *An American in Paris* is not so much its love story as it is how the full realization of one's self

and one's art (the self as a work in process) occurs through the combination of love and imagination. Transformed by the energy endorsed by Minnelli, Jerry's approach to eros is placed in contrast to the attitudes embodied by those around him. They are, in fact, diagrammatic in the manner they represent stances which actually minify the force of aesthetic eros.

One major way the film conveys Jerry's creative metamorphosis is through the use of colour. As he studies a black and white self-portrait near the start of the musical, it is not clear what his disgruntled reaction toward it means. Does his response imply that the image he has of himself is lacklustre, or does it relate more to the work itself and the feeling that it misses a certain quality? That Minnelli does not view these as separate questions is later seen when Jerry falls in love with Lise. The vigour her love inspires, transports him into a totally melodic syntax which enables him, through the art of dance, to be admitted as a painter within the circle of the Parisian masters: Dufy, Renoir, Utrillo, Rousseau, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec. With Lise as his muse, this incorporation takes place during the famed 17-minute "An American in Paris" finale. Propelled by the evolving force of aesthetic eros, the span of his psycho-artistic

development can be seen in the movement from his simple two-tone charcoal self-sketch to his balletic initiation within the thorough technicolor palate of an Impressionist Paris.

Lise gives him colour (figuratively and literally), and with it greater amplitude and awareness. Jerry's broader artistic range arises from a creativity intensified by the energy of romantic love, while his heightened consciousness comes from understanding the paradox that "one properly paints the self only when he turns to another."¹²⁴ Like Jerry, Henri would also seem to embody the elements that define aesthetic eros. On the one hand, he displays a dandyish captivation with himself (his looks and stage success), while on the other, he happily recognizes his need for love and relational being. And though his role is rather lightweight, his generosity and empathy make Henri the film's most sympathetic character. Yet when he describes Lise to Adam through a series of art-historical backdrops set against the music of "Embraceable You," what the sequence suggests is that Henri's interest in Lise is perhaps chiefly ornamental.

The relation of love to creativity and the function of aesthetics is what distinguishes the artistry of Henri from Jerry: "For Henri, Lise's beauty is comparable to

different styles of interior decoration, but for Jerry her charm is the crucial source of his creative imagination."¹²⁵

Divorcing romantic love from art, Adam and Milo offer less subtle reasons why neither achieve an artful life.

Each one is depicted as an inversion of the other: Adam seeks art to the exclusion of intimacy, while Milo only uses art to attract sentiment. "One's company, two's a crowd," carps Adam when Jerry interrupts him to wax on about the salesgirl Lise. The profound degree of Adam's self-containedness is shown in the sweepingly narcissistic music gag, "Concerto in F." As he lies on his bed absorbed in thought, one hand on his trouser pocket and smoking, the performance is presented as an undisguised autoerotic daydream. Just as in the "An American in Paris" spectacular, the virtuosity presented here derives direct from libido and imagination. His fantasia differs from Jerry's, however, in that it features a single cast member: himself. Not only does he comprise the entire symphony orchestra (pianist, conductor, tympanist, string section), but also appears as a wild fan who gives the exhibition a standing ovation! Milo, in contrast, suffers from the opposite outlook. Her ego identity is so fragile that she feels the need to possess a man. The film discloses she has a

history of such (no-win) behaviour. "When are you going to stop getting involved with young itinerate artists? It never works." a friend warns her. "If they're no good, you're ashamed, and if they are, they get too independent." Her hair style, white single shoulder gown, and name ("Yes, as in Venus de") connect her to the celebrated Greek statue. But with her heart fixed on Jerry, Milo hopes he will reverse her string of failed relationships so as to empower her to become the work of art she aspires to be. Milo's ambition agrees with Minnelli's sensibility except that whereas Adam attempts to locate meaning outside of the social, she searches for it outside of the self. Hence though they form inimical characters, their split approach to art retards them both: he by being a cynic, neurotic, and nicotine fiend; she, by being an emotional vampire. With Adam remaining "the world's oldest child prodigy" and Milo by herself, their failure to integrate love and art (and therefore the self and the social) means that they stay as severed as they began.

Finally, what of Lise, the only character in *An American in Paris* who is not engaged with any of the momentous questions related to work, love, and identity? Moreover, if she is the inspirational figure for Jerry, is he positioned the same way for her? (That is, what

of Lise's process of self-actualization and Jerry's role in it?) Since she has less than half the scenes he does, and is never featured in a number where she sings (in contradistinction to his five), Lise functions more as a feminine icon and love object than as a three-dimensional character. The lovers are not treated in a commensurate manner, and equality is as vital for aesthetic eros as disparity is for its ascetic opposite.

In the ascetic position, love is conceived as submission to the person or object venerated (be it the veneration of the religious for God, the rationalist for logic, the humanist for progress, the artist for art, or the realist for life without illusion). But the aesthetic approach does not define love as a self erasure recruited in the service of a totalizing Absolute; rather, it is regarded as the principal means for two persons to realize their separate identities before expanding or even transcending them. As a result, the imbalance Minnelli erects in his construction of Jerry and Lise is against the aesthetic eros he has been crafting all along. However the sexism which debilitates this sensibility does not end there, but turns misogynist in the treatment of Milo. While Jerry's annoying pursuit of Lise is meant to be endearing, Milo's quest for Jerry is taken as grotesque. Though her agony is largely self-inflicted Jerry's

behaviour towards her (as in the Café Flaubert) is never called into question, let alone overturned or subverted.

Because Milo is, as Adam says, the type of woman who acts like a man but wants to be valued like a woman, the disdain directed toward her stems from her aggressive ("male") stance. That she is an older woman chasing a younger man only adds to her supposed degeneracy. For unlike the comfortable view of gender roles that Lise neatly offers and confirms, Milo threatens Jerry's parochial masculinity and heterosexuality. In this way, the film's restrictive sex and gender constructions attenuate its liberatory thrust. This, in spite of, and counter to, its effusive and sometimes bursting photography (compare, for instance, the maniacally hued "Concerto in F" with its bronzes and blacks to the ballet's saturation of colour), music, as well as the bright art direction, choreography, and costumes.

The strategy of *The Pirate* is to exaggerate the characteristics of traditional gender roles to suggest that these attributes are performatory, and so lead to freer bonds between men and women. This is altogether unlike *Meet Me in St. Louis* which is committed to a conventional heterosexuality, however consuming the ideal. Here gender difference is pushed so far that it collapses, thus exposing an innate rather than striven-

for equality between both groups. The subversive form used to arrive at this knowledge is camp. Besides the look and feel of the film as well as Garland and Kelly's acting style, Cole Porter's songs help to create this aesthetic and thereby further the liberatory aims of *The Pirate*. As the narrative follows its heroine's movement from a fight or flight position to her courage through love to a creative life, the film posits self and agency. Importantly, it is a vision of identity (especially as it is reflected in gender) that goes from hyperbolic constructions to polymorphic ones. Before analysing how camp is deployed to facilitate this movement, I will look at the account of Macoco's exploits which opens the film. It is a cogent sequence because though it seems equivocal in the manner the real and imaginary relate to epistemological point of view (a signifier of agency), closer inspection suggests an author.

With watercolours providing a condensed visual montage, a voice over accompanies this painterly account of the legendary Macoco's career:

The History of the Pirate Mack, the Black Macoco: Macoco the dazzling, Macoco the fabulous, the hawk of the sea, the prince of pirates whose spirit and legend will live on through the ages for his immortal deeds as

here and after set forth and whose glorious and formidable exploits are here related in a true history. Staggering to the imagination and ravishing the sensibilities with tales of wealth, of gold and silver beyond all dreams of avarice, of stolen treasure, of maidens captive, of villages destroyed, of cities decimated by a whim or a caress.

When the narrative ends its storyteller is revealed. Though it was Manuela who had recounted the spectacle as well as whose hand guided it with illustrations taken from a book on the buccaneer's life, still, the film's representation of the subjective position organizing this sequence's point of view seems evasive. Once she proceeds past the book's first page, it is not clear whether what she is saying originates from subsequent printed text in the biography or from her own imagination. This is because, except for the first page, nothing written is again shown. (Even on that page Manuela only reads the opening sentence and omits the rest of the text.) Some phrasing heard in her account borrows from authoritative sounding discourse, but most of it is the opposite: extravagant and lushly romantic. On the one hand, "as here and after set forth" has a literary, legal ring. And beyond the first page, she explicitly states that the history being presented is a "true" one. On the other hand, the

story's mythic quality (one matching the dramatic fervour heard in her voice) goes against the stereotypically dry, dispassionate prose of official biographies. The conjunctives and many prepositions that she uses also render the entire account breathless and may connote an excited spontaneity.

The filmic and rhetorical organization of this inaugural sequence thus discloses a variety of epistemic readings, each one possible. The first is that even though written material is not shown after the initial page, Manuela is simply the reader and not the author of what she relates (indeed it is irrefutable that just as the book declares itself the biographical authority it likewise contains lyrically story book watercolours). The second is that Manuela, not limited to one discursive style, is the sole author who uses the pictures as a visual supplement. The third is that Manuela embellishes on and/or edits an off-camera script (such as printed text opposite each illustrated page), and in this way becomes a co-author of the montage. But of the three readings it is the last one which best explains the contrasting prose, the arrangement of the sequence, and the tonal alignment (in terms of feeling) between the picture images and narration. The real and the imaginary thus support the other, but with the

centre of narrative gravity turning upon the agency of a self possessing creative skills and design.

The point of view in this sequence, with its slippery plays on reality and fantasy in regard to an implied self, is redolent of the film's constantly shifting overlaps between authenticity and acting in relation to identity. There is not a more intricate display of the latter than in the climactic sequence of Serafin's "career end" swansong. Here the fluid but not altogether relative elements that make up the self and persona as related to Serafin, Manuela, and Don Pedro are shown. To begin with, there is the level of Gene Kelly as dancer, Judy Garland as singer, and Walter Slezak as actor (all of them real life figures who are Hollywood performers worth watching). On top of this, there are Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, and Walter Slezak in Minnelli's film, role-playing, respectively, as the characters Serafin, Manuela, and Don Pedro (all of them as *dramatis personae* worth taking seriously). Finally, there are Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, and Walter Slezak role-playing as the movie's leads with each character, in turn, role-playing: Serafin the star strolling player acting as a pirate, Manuela the ingénue acting hypnotized, and Don Pedro, who is actually Macoco, acting like a gentleman. In the process, all of them

disclose aspects of their characters that lay bare a hidden side-- the vulnerability of Serafin, the artistry of Manuela, the past life of "Don Pedro" --thus creating complex individuals worth being engaged by.

However it is during Manuela's crooning of "Love of My Life" that this situation becomes more intricate. During the number the viewer is given superior knowledge in knowing that Manuela is not in a trance, but pretends to be so to aid Serafin in getting Don Pedro to confess to being Macoco. To do this she humiliates the "namby-pamby" mayor "who's afraid of the sea" while offering to worship at the feet of "Macoco"/Serafin. Once the song starts Manuela seems to be addressing herself to Serafin-as-Macoco, but the spectator realizes what the internal audience does not: that she is really directing her passion to Serafin-as-Serafin. This is conveyed in the lyrics (with its references to angels), in the tender motions between them, and in how it is alike in style and tone with the earlier "You Can Do No Wrong." It was in that song Manuela first acknowledged her love of him (knowing him to be a fake yet accepting him and lauding his acting), and as with that previous ballad "Love of My Life" finishes with a kiss (the only two they are seen exchanging). Yet "Love of My Life" occurs in a location of theatre-within-theatre (on a stage

within a ritual of public hanging), with Garland and Kelly deliberately over-playing their roles-within-roles. "In other words," as Dyer notes, "at the point in the film most signalled as illusion, we get the most direct expression of 'true' feeling."¹²⁶ Their plan succeeds and with it more ironies. One is that when Don Pedro moves to break up Manuela and Serafin, he does so by rushing on stage and it is there he discloses himself as the ex-marauder. Happily for the lover-artists but tragically for Don Pedro, "the stage-- and by extension the film --is the only place where legend and life can become one."¹²⁷ The other twist is that it is also this location where Manuela reveals her true self and thereby "comes out" while acting.

The Pirate is about the plurality of the self, going so far as to champion a psychic and emotional nomadism. Sustaining this kind of multiplicity calls for strong ego structures, an identity with continuity, history, and boundaries. For much of the narrative Manuela resists such fluidity, building instead more rigid ideas of gender and sexuality even as such constructions are seen as tenuous and hilariously strained. But the film shows that she must pass from "hard" formulations of identity to reach "soft" ones, and furthermore, that to be "soft" means that she must also in a sense be "hard."

To convey this Minnelli turns to camp, an aesthetic that knowingly plays on the often complex relationship between reality and imagination (or the hard and the soft) from the framework of desire. Since desire is what defines Manuela, examining "The Pirate Ballet" will show how Minnelli elucidates this interplay as it is one of the best scenes of her overheated libido. Sharing with "Mack the Black" a hyper-intensity deriving from Manuela's exclusive attention to her desire, this number reveals an astonishing contrast to the conventional Garland persona. Her yearning aspect is the indelible trait of her star image, one that strikes a fragile yet generous balance between trying to achieve her hopes and helping others to attain theirs. But in "The Pirate Ballet" it is as if the energy repressed in her most renown characters-- Dorothy of *The Wizard of Oz*, Esther Smith of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and Vicki Lester of *A Star is Born* (Cukor, 1954) --takes on its own provocative life.

The most notable feature of "The Pirate Ballet" is that it occurs not in real time and space but in Manuela's graphic imagination. (Indeed the number is constructed very theatrically with her bedroom balcony providing the perfect theatre balcony.) She takes the actual event of Serafin vanquishing a band of local police in the square

below (defeated, in part, because of the fear of him being "Macoco"), and then his sportive assault of a sitting mare, as material from which she deliriously projects her image of Macoco. Her libidinous imagination out of control, the area beneath her takes on an atmosphere of hallucination: the sunny plaza is transformed into a hellish wreck of a port city burning in ruins, the captive mare becomes a woman crouching in terror, and the gamesome Serafin changes into the legendary cutthroat. Tied to a flaunting athleticism, Serafin had always looked like a dashing sea rover. (When the Viceroy later arrests him, he says with relish how Serafin "fills the eye" as embodying the appearance popularly expected of a pirate.) But intensifying his exaggerated skill-as-skill to the degree of caricature, "The Pirate Ballet" pastiches the customary images of masculinity as action-directed even as they bring "to life" those found in Macoco's pictorially elliptical exploits.

An extreme representation of phallic masculinity, Macoco destroys men and menaces women. Condensing the intrepid choreographies of battle at the heart of Erich Wolfgang Korngold-scored swashbucklers like *Captain Blood* (1935) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940, both Curtiz) into a literal ballet of violence, the number displays the total reign

of the phallus. Supercharged with pyrotechnic effects and audacious sexual symbolism (large cutlasses, a parade of torches, towering lookouts, murderous flintlocks, one enormous spear), and often photographed at crotch level, the sequence is structured as a rape fantasy.

Camping the number's subject matter allows Minnelli to make it palpable. To ground this material in a camp register is to ask that it be taken seriously while undermining any seriousness about it. This style is used until the coda of *The Pirate*, with various consequences. Because half of the function of camp is to trivialize feeling, the film is purposely not like *Meet Me in St. Louis* in being emotionally involving. The dire possibilities of Manuela having to marry Don Pedro or Serafin being executed do not, for example, match the prospect of the Smiths abandoning St. Louis. (Ideologically, this suggests that perhaps an investment of such feeling is necessary in musicals depicting complementary heterosexuality in order to make the difficulties inherent in this model worth the effort.) Meanwhile, it is this dimension of camp that permits Minnelli to demystify sex and gender arrangements by revealing them as forms of drag. Yet even as camp parodies these normative categories by making them

appear theatrical (acting them to excess), it also exalts these differences by an extreme adulation. The manner Kelly's physique is rendered and the actions he performs as Macoco are the richest sources of camp in the ballet. Personifying the epic virility (and agency) Manuela idolizes, each construction enables him to leave a "flaming trail of masculinity." Centred on Kelly, the number is in awe of mythic manliness while conscious that machismo on this scale can only exist as fantasy. Specifically this is seen in how Kelly's muscles are such grandiose displays of brawn that they end up being sublime, just as his movements display dominance yet in themselves are unusually pointless or redundant. As to the first, his rippling thighs (emphasized by his boots and skimpy attire) and formidable biceps (accentuated by a gold arm band) are too elaborate to be commonplace; and as to the second, his soaring aloft to the lookout to add fire to the conflagration below or his shooting of thieves already in retreat, are solely power exhibitions.

Even as their most essentialist qualities are glorified, the soft yet hard aspect of identity operating in this number goes beyond disclosing the performatory nature of sex and gender roles. It also challenges the interplay of activity and passivity found in the gendered

narrative codes of classical Hollywood film (as well as wider Western art) having to do with positions of gazing and being the object of the gaze. On the one hand, Macoco perfectly encapsulates the way males are depicted. In Ways of Seeing John Berger writes:

A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies. . . .A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be fabricated, in the sense that he pretends to be capable or not. But the presence is always towards a power he exercises on others.¹²⁸

On the other hand, Macoco's superfluous dynamism cancels the flow of action. It ostensibly reinforces the conventional image of men as action-directed, but such a strategy only conceals that he is constructed in a manner traditionally redolent of women: as a "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."¹²⁹ While he moves in a three-dimensional space and not a flat one (in what would be a manoeuvre to disavow any hint of passivity), Macoco is still rendered with a woman-associated "to-be-looked-at-ness" as Laura Mulvey would write.¹³⁰ This reverses the usual representation of men, just as Manuela's staring down at him (within her erotic fantasy) reverses the standard position and power of

women. Yet "The Pirate Ballet" discloses the activity behind "passivity" and the passivity supporting "activity": he has her in his thrall though he is nothing more than an animated pin-up. Therefore both gazing and being the object of the gaze can be seen as, in certain ways, active and passive positions of power and pleasure. This not only comes across here, but in the equally radical "Mack the Black." Each displays *Manuela's* sexual desire.

In the earlier number she was made the object of his stare, but like him in the later one she expresses herself as a controlling spectacle in anything but an iconographic manner. Comparable to "The Pirate Ballet" (or "Niña"), this scene attests to the two-sided makeup of active and passive: he (the gazer), is forcibly sidelined but is captivated by her artistic libido; she (the object), inhabits the limelight while her incapacitated social censor annuls her responsibility. In their supposedly fixed dynamics, activity and passivity turn out to have remarkable oscillations evocative of the "Carib-BE-an or CaRIBB-ean" waters of which *Manuela* sings.

Making the gaze and the object of the gaze relative categories of activity and passivity lets *The Pirate* subvert gender difference, and reveal alternative models

to heterosexual-style ascetic eros. By applying to Manuela the same narrative codes used for Serafin, Minnelli exposes the polymorphic qualities within these dualisms as a basis for what will be an overt equality between the lovers. Thus even as gender difference is portrayed with such insistence that it becomes comically overwrought, a more subtle undermining of the accustomed image of masculinity and femininity transpires. These strategies allow for the transition to aesthetic varieties of eros. However the film employs other devices as signifiers of the evolution taking place in Manuela. Progressing from Barbara Cartland to Jane Austen and, finally, to New Woman amatory models of heterosexuality, the following areas collaborate to indicate changes in her development: the writing style of Cole Porter's lyrics, and the presentation as such of the male and female bodies. I will look to the numbers to trace this ascent, but none more so than the "Be a Clown" routine that is the finale of *The Pirate*. Like camp, these markers divulge a distinctly "queer" sensibility within the visionary arena of a larger Romanticism.

For over half the plot, Manuela allows herself to be ruled by the governing forces of ascetic eros. That it is a subordination she wrestles with is viewed in a

scene like the one of her marriage day where, on impulse, she goes to her closet to retrieve the box containing the wide brimmed hat that recalls her meeting of Serafin at the sea wall. Wistfully she presses it next to her face before becoming conscious of unguarded feelings and then dropping it in fright. (That it is limp and yielding is reflective of her own enfeebled disposition. But it is the wrong kind of softness since it permits her oppression.) As I have analysed, two numbers of this narrative period ("Mack the Black," "The Pirate Ballet") not only show Manuela's imaginative side, but all of them (including "Niña") convey overdetermined accounts of gender difference based on inequality. There is an especially heavy emphasis on gendered pronouns in each of the sung numbers, an insistence just as much displayed in the actual physical composition of the protagonists. However once Manuela confesses to Serafin that she loves him (in what forms "You Can Do No Wrong"), the new shape of their relationship (the gender-specific yet equal arrangement that is complementary heterosexuality) is also suggested in these filmic signifiers.

Here Porter keeps his pronouns neutral ("you"), thereby bestowing onto Manuela an equality she has not had with Serafin. Switching places, it is she who proclaims her

affection for him as he lies cradled on her lap. Of all the music in the film, it is this tune and "Love of My Life" with their indeterminate pronouns that are most typical of Porter's style. The homosexual Porter revelled in lyrics in which the gender of either addresser or addressee in his songs is not spelled out ("In the Still of the Night," "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," "So in Love," "From this Moment On," "After You, Who?," not to mention the famous line from "Night and Day," "A voice within me, keeps repeating, 'YOU, YOU, YOU'"). This also comes through in a song like "Too Darn Hot" in which such ambiguity of gender allows for a heterosexual and gay male reading-- "Mister Gob/for his squab, A marine/for his queen, A G.I./for his cutie pie."¹³¹ Meanwhile the clothes of Manuela and Serafin conform to conventions of gender difference by having him in attire that communicates a severe and cavalier masculinity, and her in a dress that declares a supple and classic femininity. Together the song lyrics and clothes convey a complementary heterosexuality: the pronouns of "You Can Do No Wrong" indicate a parity between them while their clothes signify difference. Yet their gender role-reversal suggests that gender difference is so contingent as to be a conjuration.

"Ladies and Gentlemen: don't move, don't stir, the best is yet to come." With Serafin's announcement, Minnelli's musical abruptly enters its closing sequence.

This coda features the lovers (who are now a show team) doing a slapstick reprise of "Be a Clown," a routine Serafin had earlier performed with members of his acting troupe (the Nicholas Brothers) in great acrobatic style.

As with the rest of the film, "Be a Clown" affirms the paradox of how the authentic resides in the theatrical and vice-versa. For example, the jump cut that radically opens the sequence deliberately calls attention to the film's own illusion by its direct address to the audience. This use of editing "breaks nearly every Hollywood rule for smooth transitions" to shake the viewer from his or her "immersion in fiction" and thus to reflect on how the film is a constructed spectacle.¹³² At the same time, there is a sense as Serafin and Manuela hug one another and laugh together during the final fade-out, that it is real life stars Kelly and Garland "falling about laughing at the fun they've just been making in the film."¹³³ As a result, the number is not about the victory of illusion over the real, but the triumph of personal agency that uses artifice as a means toward identity expansion. Just after Serafin had declared himself to be Mack the Black, he had given the confused Manuela a choice: "A life of

splendid danger with me or a sorry existence with this creature [Don Pedro]." This last number represents the culmination of Manuela's decision to undertake a life of creative adventure, and the jump cut that inaugurates this sequence is but a portent of larger breaks in style, tone and representation that separate this sequence from the rest of *The Pirate*.

Alongside "Make'em Laugh" in *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen and Kelly, 1952), "Be a Clown" is the Hollywood musical's top homage to the comedic art of clowning. Significantly, Manuela's transformation as an artist leads her to the least pretentious and most fluid of performing styles. The view of herself seen in this number is the apotheosis of her development in the film.

Here she enjoys a "softness" (lack of ego or fixedness) that creates a "hardness" (an acclaimed identity), much like a holy fool. Such a dynamic goes against conventional wisdom, as she and Serafin acknowledge:

Be a clown, be a clown
 All the world loves a clown.
 Act the fool, play the calf,
 And you'll always have the last laugh.
 Wear the cap and the bells
 And you'll rate with all the great swells.

To exhibit this state of being, the arrangement of this sequence differs dramatically in three important areas from what has gone before. The first is a change of style, one that goes from camp ironies to innocent light fun. This is related to the change of tone that transfers from that of repressed sexuality to all-out humour. Laughter is akin to sensuality because it is an activity which adds to the scope of perception and satisfaction: "Just as the quick-witted get more out of life by seeing the humorous side where the literal-minded miss the joke, so the erotically erudite will be incited to passion by what leaves others cold."¹³⁴ Camp is dispensed with since its value as a deconstructive tool to expose the limits of ascetic eros is no longer required: Manuela is both an artist and a work of art. These changes segue into the last one, from sexism and (then) complementary expressions of amatory heterosexuality to a supplementary representation. In the attire and makeup of clowns, what they wear suggests a sameness rather than a difference between them-- they have transcended the pathology of oedipalized formulations. That they are entertainers is redolent of, and related to, this liberatory sex and gender design. As Otto Rank saw, "The creative urge is a bisexual urge-- of begetting and of bearing, or of self-begetting and self-rebirth, which he [the artist] has

fused into one."¹³⁵ Fittingly, the final number in *The Pirate* is not a love song, but a duet between Manuela and Serafin (their only one) who exhibit a wider romance by creating art --as equal partners. The musical's libidinal drive may no longer be felt, but Manuela arrives at her fulfillment as an artist and lover because of the erotic and not in spite of it.

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Section 3

ASTAIRE AND MINNELLI

Chapter 6

THE BAND WAGON: The Intersection of Two Auteurs

Density of coherence, by its nature, cannot be instantly achieved. A level of asserted meaning is an indispensable stage between the setting out of givens and the creation of a complex structure.

Many fine movies start from simple propositions and crude confrontations. Thus *Ugetsu Monogatari* [1953, Kenji Mizoguchi] is built from a schematic opposition of misery and ambition, devastation and toil. *La Règle du jeu* [1939, Jean Renoir] opens with a blatant juxtaposition of modern technology and romantic chivalry. In *Johnny Guitar* [1954, Nicholas Ray] and *Carmen Jones* [1954, Otto Preminger], the initial relationships between solidarity and isolation, freedom and enclosure, are boldly outlined.

In any of the films listed above we find subtlety and complexity not (where it's nonsensical to look for them) in the initial scheme, but in the organization of details whose relationships simultaneously complicate and clarify the movie's viewpoint. At this level of coherence significance is locked into the picture's form. We are taken beyond the realm of the language substitute which provides an illustration of messages, opinions and themes. The separately discernible meanings become important less for their independent value than for their contributions, mutually deepening and defining, to a total vision.

V. F. Perkins, Film as Film

Introduction

Like the oppositions found in the films described by V.F. Perkins, *The Band Wagon* sets up "simple propositions and crude confrontations" that are developed by both Minnelli and Astaire into a musical of remarkable richness and rare maturity.¹³⁶ "Boldly outlined" at its start are two familiar oppositions: isolation and collaboration, high art and popular entertainment. Though the film will clearly uphold the second term of each paired opposition, and reveal that these qualities not only parallel, but are crucially tied to, the coming together of the central heterosexual couple played by Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, this 1953 film is more complex than the triumph of certain values and relationships.

The Band Wagon is a paragon of synthetic craftsmanship even as it promotes what Jane Feuer labels "the myth of integration." As an overdetermined strategy found in US musicals, the myth of integration is one in which the success of the movie's internal musical show is "intimately bound up" with other achievements in the plot. Aware that few musicals better transmit this myth than *The Band Wagon*, she traces how the film draws together the success of the show not only with success in love, but with the integration of individuals into

communities or united groups. Moreover, as she finds, the power of this myth is so forceful that (elite) art and (low) entertainment merge and undergird one another.¹³⁷ (This last form of integration is highly descriptive of Minnelli and, as I will argue, true of Astaire.) In this way, although *The Band Wagon* is structured around two paired oppositions with a solid movement from the first term within each binary to the second, all of the terms are nevertheless "mutually deepening and defining." A third critical paired opposition, one that literally opens the film, stands out. Organized around the memory of the successful Thirties Astaire compared to the lonely, down-and-out Astaire of the Fifties (really of the Forties), this paired opposition is less simplistic and crude than the other two (although it is inseparable from them), because it bears directly on the vital aspects of a filmic and extra-filmic life over time.

Thus what characterizes *The Band Wagon* is the extraordinary level of integration it rhetorically champions and filmically achieves, together with the self-reflective awareness it communicates as to changes in Astaire's persona. The other prominent characteristic of the film, one that is practically overlooked in treatments of *The Band Wagon*, is the

sympathy bestowed on Astaire by Minnelli-- a feature I will outline shortly. By 1953, Astaire was well past the World War II era constructions of him being a heel or hapless hero or both.

After his self-imposed retirement between 1946-48, he had returned to musicals with two triumphant successes: *Easter Parade* (1948), followed by an unexpected reteaming with Rogers in *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949). Upon his return, he was cast as the kind of dapper characters he had enjoyed during the Thirties. The singularity he manifested that went out of fashion during the first half of the Forties, came back into style in America at the end of the decade. In a variety of trends ranging from the House Un-American Activities Committee Report on Communism, to the rise of the "virtue of selfishness" *Übermensch* philosophy enkindled by Ayn Rand's bestsellers, to the hostility Jackie Robinson suffered as the first "coloured" baseball player in the major leagues, the conformity moving across the country was not toward a team spirit mentality as had happened during the war. Instead the conformity was directed toward a grand worship of the individual, but it was a definition of individuality that everyone was assumed to agree on, namely, a white, patriarchal, heterosexual, middle-class one.

Consequently, Astaire's comeback coincided with this change-- one rife with elaborate contradictions --in the national mood. Proof of his full acceptance not only came in the type of roles Astaire was given again, but in his commercial and critical success. The crown of achievement in both areas was possibly the special Oscar he was presented in 1949, "for his unique artistry and his unique contributions to the technique of musical pictures."¹³⁸

Now moving into the Fifties, he enjoyed a string of hits (*Three Little Words* [Richard Thorpe, 1950], *Let's Dance* [Norman Z. McLeod, 1950], and *Royal Wedding* [Donen, 1951]) and then a rare misfire (*The Belle of New York* [1952]). His next film was *The Band Wagon*, and it is reasonable to believe that he had mixed feelings before doing it. On the one hand, Minnelli appeared to be at the height of his artistry with outstanding success in comedy (*Father of the Bride* in 1950), musicals (*An American in Paris* which amassed more Academy Awards than any other musical until that time—including "Best Picture of 1951"), and melodrama (*The Bad and the Beautiful* in 1952). On the other hand, Astaire was just getting over a box office disappointment, and importantly it was his first one since starring in Minnelli's own experimentally offbeat *Yolanda and the*

Thief. In addition, it is impossible that he did not know of the similarities between himself and the Tony Hunter character in the less than thinly veiled biographical parallels, star iconography, and song-and-dance personas they share in *The Band Wagon*.¹³⁹

Even before *The Band Wagon*, three of the movies Astaire headlined in the period between 1948-52 are conscious of his life and work. *Royal Wedding* is a warm valentine to the rosy memory of his stage career with his sister. In it the Adele-like character played by Jane Powell likewise retires from the footlights once she marries English aristocracy. At the same time, *The Barkleys of Broadway* does little to disguise it being about the other renowned working relationship in Astaire's career: Ginger Rogers. Finally, *Easter Parade*, his best Forties picture (whether judging his wartime era movies or those made after coming out of his retirement), plainly centres on the authorship aspect of Astaire in relation to all of his partners in which he figures not only as a romantic (romancy) leading man, but also as a "discreetly tyrannical"¹⁴⁰ Pygmalion or Svengali personage to each Galatea or Trilby-like apprentice (the young woman here is Judy Garland). In *Top Hat* I demonstrated how this aspect was cloaked by his charm, and why in a 1941-46 period movie such as *The Sky's the*

Limit it is later enfeebled and often extinguished. When he came back to the screen, he was allowed to direct his relationships again-- with two differences. The first one, a preview of which was viewed earlier in *Carefree* (1938), is the degree his control is laid bare.

Yet unlike that film, he is allowed to be charming even as he is revealed pulling the strings of his pupil-lover. The second difference follows, but it is far from what was seen in *Top Hat*. In studying *Easter Parade* and *The Barkleys of Broadway*, Altman finds Astaire being forced to learn the same lesson regarding the true meaning of the teacher/student bond in work and heterosexual romance. The lesson of these myths is that while the man may have the power and ability to transform the woman by unleashing her potential, as soon as:

the woman senses that she is being treated as an object, as material to be molded by a haughty and self-confident man, the flow of energy across the couple's bond immediately ceases.¹⁴¹

In *Easter Parade* it is only as Astaire falls in love with Garland that he acquires the essential ingredient which paves the way for them becoming a successful dance team: sensitivity. Before that, he had relied on formal repetition that distanced the two of them and inhibited

the release of her abundant talent. Indeed as long as he handles her as an object, despite his status as a dance pro and him being more experienced in love, it is actually the pliant Garland who has a true awareness of things (she being the one who first realizes they love each other and who knows before he does that she has to perform in her own style) and final agency (she taking the initiative in courting him by giving him an Easter bonnet-- a top hat, naturally --and further shifting gender roles by singing to him "In Your Easter Bonnet").

Like *Meet Me in St. Louis* there is a scrambling of the usual male and female positions related to love and work (each person at various points teaching or learning from the other), with the film closing on an equality between its central heterosexual couple.

The Barkleys of Broadway is not as complex in representing the Pygmalion/Galatea and Svengali/Trilby archetypes, and because it explicitly treats Rogers's decision 10 years earlier to leave musicals for comedic and dramatic parts as a digression, the film does not end with equality between her and Astaire. Still, the movie reiterates for Astaire the lesson that success in love and work (the myth of integration again) does not derive from a skilled instructor who demands impersonal practice, but from an affectionate lover who can inspire

his pupil to bring out her creative talent. This is seen toward the end of the film when Astaire, after driving her away by taking all the credit for her success as he belittled her desire to expand her acting range ("It took a lot of patience to put you where you are. I worked, I pulled things out of you, I molded you. . . ."), comes to her aid as she struggles with her role as the young Sarah Bernhardt. In giving her instructions over the phone by posing as her director, he not only acknowledges her acting skills but loves and supports her. As a result she improves and then succeeds as a non-musical performer. Discovering his ruse, she stages a reconciliation with him set to a record of him singing "You'd Be Hard to Replace" and happily gives up dramatic acting for "fun set to music" with him.

Sharing with these earlier films both the myth of integration and a look backward to specific periods of Astaire's career, *The Band Wagon* also centres on the lessons he eventually learns concerning love and work that develop out of a teacher/student relationship. But as I will argue in the analysis proper of *The Band Wagon*, the myth of integration is depicted in a more heightened yet subtle way in the film, its retrospective history of Astaire is whole rather fragmentary

(inclusive of his theatrical and celluloid work), and its construction of complementary heterosexual bonds more mature.

What distinguishes how these three vital aspects are presented is the manner in which Minnelli filters them through a comparison of Astaire's *Top Hat* persona and the drubbing it took during the war years. If one has knowledge of his musicals from 1941-46 and yet is unaware of a movie like *Easter Parade* made between 1948-52, it would then feel as though *The Band Wagon* is a conscious effort by Minnelli to rehabilitate Astaire's career. Yet, despite a dud at the box office, Astaire's career did not need a lift in 1953. So how does one interpret what Minnelli is doing? The answer, clear in numerous ways throughout the movie, is that Minnelli furnishes Astaire with a compassionate but never sentimental healing of what the singer-dancer went through during the early to mid-Forties. Five years was distance enough from that time to go back and comes to terms with that experience.

This is the sympathetic aspect Minnelli bestows on Astaire that I alluded to earlier. As he demonstrated towards his characters in *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *The Pirate*, Minnelli's generous spirit--one in which he allows everyone to have "their reasons" --extends from

heroine (Esther Smith, Manuela) to "villain" (Mr. Smith, Don Pedro). (It is precisely the lack of this quality in *An Americanin Paris* that makes it so odd.) In analysing Astaire singing "By Myself," for example, I will show how Minnelli's direction of the number suggests that lonely Astaire might be reaping what he once sowed, yet still surrounding him in a "sympathetic *mise-en-scène*" that lyricizes his condition.¹⁴² In addition to the generosity of spirit usually descriptive of Minnelli's work, one wonders if the film is a kind of apology to the dancer-singer from its director, who, in *Yolanda and the Thief* (1945) and *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946), cast Astaire in an unflattering light. (Comparable to that on *The Pirate*, new work--especially, though not exclusively, research of producer Arthur Freed's "fairy" unit at MGM and queer readings of Minnelli's early musicals --has begun to bring these two neglected films from under the shadow of the more well-known *Singin' in the Rain* and *The Band Wagon*.¹⁴³)

Stylistically both musicals anticipate the greater Fifties movies, specifically in the hyper-imaginative dance spectacles-- productions that are often psychological and campy (*Yolanda and the Thief*'s "Will You Marry Me?" for example). Furthermore, as with *The Pirate*, these films contain aspects that stress the

performative nature of identity as well as alternative ethnic representations (*Ziegfeld Follies*) and subversive readings regarding heterosexual love and marriage (*Yolanda and the Thief*). Although Minnelli did not direct either number or skit, the first film, one done in a revue format and with the strong flavour of his personality, "showcases Lena Horne and Fanny Brice, stage stars too 'ethnic' [an African-American singer and a Yiddish comic actress] for the middle-brow WASP depictions sought by Metro."¹⁴⁴ (Here it should be noted that Minnelli's first movie was the all-black musical *Cabin in the Sky* [1943] starring, among others, Horne.)

Meanwhile, in the second film, Minnelli subverts the typical happy ending in which the central heterosexual couple marry at the close. He does this by having the Astaire character react to seeing a snapshot of his future as a family man in a way that recalls the vivid sense of entrapment he felt earlier during the "Will You Marry Me?" nightmare sequence. Nonetheless despite these and other fascinating features of both movies, Minnelli did utilize Astaire where, as I remarked in Part I, the singer-dancer was constructed as a heel and/or as a helpless hero.

In studying *The Band Wagon*, I will discuss the humility Minnelli expresses in the movie as evidence of him

making amends towards Astaire. This comes through in what Harvey writes are the numerous instances of "technical self-effacement" seen in his direction, and insofar as the Jeffrey Cordova character (Jack Buchanan) stands for Minnelli himself. Crucially, as Peter Hogue says, one of the major things the film concerns is the "fundamental seriousness of 'fun'"¹⁴⁵ but it is so while maintaining a sympathetic air-- not just to Hunter(Astaire) but to Cordova (Minnelli) also. Finally, this sense of reaching out to Astaire is felt as well in the dignity with which he is treated and loved by Minnelli.

These three distinct yet interlocking paired critical oppositions in *The Band Wagon*-- individual isolation and group collaboration, elite art and popular entertainment, the Thirties Astaire and the Forties Astaire --all act as parts to form a "total vision." But how are these binaries constructed and then resolved? If they do contribute towards expressing a total vision, whose vision is it? And lastly, but most importantly, what is this vision in relation to the manner heterosexuality is represented? In this my summary chapter, I will delve into the myth of integration not only as it applies to the rhetorical makeup of the film but as to its filmic composition as

well. For this reason, I will analyse each of the paired critical oppositions as they develop through the course of the film in both senses of integration. At the same time, I will illustrate the ways in which, though separate, the three binaries are linked together immediately from the start, and therefore the effect they have on one another in this process of transformation towards a total vision. My examination of them, and of the total vision they eventually form, will be arranged around the construction of gender roles regarding the professional and romantic evolution of the central heterosexual couple. After tracing and looking at the development of each paired critical opposition in this light, the chapter will conclude with an examination of the film's final number-- the nearly 12 minute show-within-a-show "Girl Hunt" jazz ballet.

Yet before ending this introduction, I want to summarize in advance the movie's view of heterosexuality as formulated from this intersection between auteurs Minnelli and Astaire. *The Band Wagon*, I will argue, is another expression of director Minnelli's hopefulness concerning heterosexual life, love, and identity. (A distinction must be made between his musicals and melodramas, the first which reconcile desire and reality thereby transforming the world, and the second where the

gap between them never closes and frustration remains the condition of the world.¹⁴⁶) If in *Meet Me in St. Louis* this is viewed in how the Smith family men and women negotiate a precarious yet happy balance concerning the obstacles between them, and if in *The Pirate* it is seen in how Manuela goes from reactionary to liberatory forms of self-expression propelled by eros, then in *The Band Wagon* the delicate optimism it displays toward heterosexual relationships is by having Astaire retain the finest elements of his persona even as he treats his partner with astounding dignity and equality.

In Minnelli's hands, Astaire is transformed because his screen image is subtly but unmistakably reinvented--that is, by associating Astaire's comeback to traits such as the old-fashion value of community cooperation as well as a progressive complementary form of heterosexual romance. The person of Astaire, however, offers Minnelli the ideal subject to demonstrate the lonely undertow felt in his artists and lovers yet also his belief (at least as found in his musicals) that love and art can transform the world-- if only temporarily. Formerly it had been Garland who best carried such a resonance or embodied such a belief; now in *The Band Wagon* Astaire is able to do so not because of any depth

found in his star image such as Garland had, but due to the experience of his wartime era films and the effect they had on him. For these reasons, *The Band Wagon* was mutually beneficial. Arguably, it is the best work of either one's career (this is most true of Astaire, while in Minnelli's case it ranks, in my opinion, alongside *Meet Me in St. Louis* in the field of his musicals), and not coincidentally puts across a rich and satisfying portrait of heterosexual identity and love.

Part I

Integration Myth One: The Myth of Community

The fancy-free youth of *Top Hat* had joyously vented his desire for "No Strings, no connections/No ties to my affections," and twenty years later Tony Hunter has to ruefully pay the consequences. He takes his solitude philosophically, because he's not sure he could cope with anything else, or is personally worthy of anyone's love.

Stephen Harvey, Fred Astaire

In her seminal essay "The Self-Reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," Feuer locates some overdetermined characteristics of the Hollywood musical one of which I have already described in the introduction. Feuer's discussion of the "myth of integration" will inform my analysis of *The Band Wagon* in a way that serves to apply Perkins's general synthetic theory to this particular film. I will begin my study of it with examples drawn from her article, agreeing with her that the film "traces Tony's repeated movements from isolation to the joy of being part of a group."¹⁴⁷ This myth is the first of three such integration strategies I will look at, the two others being the victory of popular entertainment and the return of Astaire to his archetypal persona. All three are vital examples in which success is tied to

heterosexual romance for the singer-dancer.

Feuer lists four examples from *The Band Wagon* that exemplify this pattern of movement from isolation to collaboration: from when Hunter sings "By Myself" to the enthusiastic welcome given to him by his "fan club" of old dedicated friends the Martons (Oscar Levant and Nanette Fabray); from when Hunter goes into the penny arcade on Forty-Second Street feeling alien and bewildered to the zesty "Shine on Your Shoes" routine he does with a bootblack (LeRoy Daniels) that creates an audience; from when Hunter finds himself the only person to go to the official cast party after the initial rendition of "The Band Wagon" bombs to the wholly informal and spontaneous party he happens upon and which gives him another opportunity to create an audience (the "I Love Louisa" number); and finally, from near the very end when Hunter believes that Gaby (Charisse) has returned to her boyfriend Paul (James Mitchell) and that his revamped translation of "The Band Wagon" has somehow failed to the moment he comes out of his dressing room to find members of the cast waiting to thank him for making the show a smash. And in perfect accord with this myth of integration, it is Gaby who acts as their spokesperson in language where success in love and work are inseparable. Full of double meanings, she tells him

in her speech: "We love you, Tony. We belong together.

The show's going to run a long time. As far as I'm concerned, it's going to last forever." In Part I, I will examine the first and last of these movements looking at how Tony Hunter goes from a sense of being left out and alone to a feeling of being part of a group and personally loved.

The first of these four movements takes place when Hunter arrives in Grand Central Station from Hollywood.

He hesitates to get off the train, nervous about going back to the Broadway musical stage after so long an absence yet knowing that it is probably the last option worthy of his talent. Moments before two business men had indicated the state of his screen career when, reminded of him by seeing his picture in a magazine advertisement and not aware that he was right next to them, one of them declared "he was good, twelve, fifteen years ago." However when he learns that a "mob of reporters and photographers" are waiting outside the train he gets his hopes up by assuming they are there to give him "the red carpet bit." The press instantly recognize him and in a relaxed, respectful manner start to ask him friendly questions regarding his plans to return to the Great White Way. He answers nervously to the extent that his speech is rambling and clichè-ridden

while trying to pass off his unease with a forced casualness.

A more sustained example of his generally strained attempts at cheer is displayed later on as the new show plays in some out-of-town tryouts before debuting on Broadway. Again the location is a train, and across the table in a dining car Lester Marton asks Tony three questions: Has anyone heard from Paul? Does he think Paul will make a good husband for Gaby? And more personally, is it because he is too happy being a "wolf" that he never got married? His verbal reply is disjointed and babbling, with the result that the more he tries to act cool, casual, and carefree, the more he unwittingly succeeds in totally undermining any nonchalance. Tony's body language, too, reflects his overwrought off-handedness, and this is communicated not only in his overall restlessness but particularly as he waves a pencil absent-mindedly in the air.

The scene is framed in a medium two-shot that gives each character approximately equal space. But in contrast to Tony's fidgety forced cheer, Lester's motionlessness, direct gaze towards his friend, terse questions and pithy remarks (both tongue-in-cheek), and flat deep voice, could hardly be more opposite. Tony's restlessness is reinforced by the *mise-en-scène* that

places him next to a window with the scenery flickering by; in contrast, the scenery next to the well-grounded Lester is that of a still nature painting. Yet each is avoiding feelings-- Tony by dancing around the subject as if he were not painfully in love with Gaby, Lester by maintaining an ironic demeanor even after he gets Tony to admit his love for her (" . . . what you can see in a beautiful, young, and talented girl is beyond me."). Partly to calm him and then partly as a reward for being honest to himself, Lester offers, and afterwards lights, a cigarette for Tony. This gesture, just as importantly, is also the sole means of affection between them in the scene-- one allowing them a momentary coming together while retaining (and reinforcing) their separate spaces. Prior to this gesture of friendship between the two men, Tony had conveyed a sense of entrapment different from, say, the character Astaire had portrayed in *Yolanda and the Thief* where he sought to fend off love and commitment-- not to mention *Top Hat*'s playfully self-absorbed Jerry Travers. In this case, what traps him is his near inability to elucidate his yearning for love and commitment.

These two scenes in *The Band Wagon* reveal the cracks to Astaire's persona that still lingered from his Forties movies. They better display this debilitation than those

segments in which his career (and correspondingly, his love life) is pronounced dead. However they also bring out a whole other dimension of Astaire, this time a fully rounded one representing not an impossible Classicism but an earned Romanticism. This suggests that, although painful, the experience of his World War II era films was necessary for him to acquire depth, so that under the right direction his star persona could, in fact, evolve.

The sequence with the businessmen showed that Tony was not under any illusion about his fallen popularity. He even pointed out to them that it had been three years since he had starred in a film. The fact that he allows himself to believe that the reporters and photographers were there for him only to find out that it was Ava Gardner being on the train that drew them, underscores his status as a has-been and deflates even the occasional moments he permits himself to believe otherwise. During this moment and in the song that ensues, he "deflect[s] emotion rather than succumb[s] to it "as Harvey points out.¹⁴⁸ It is as if this has not only become the course of life for him, but that he accepts it. However, he does betray some feeling when a porter failing to recognize him, says, "Those poor movie stars. People won't let them alone, will they?" and in

a wry tone Tony mutters, "No. I don't know how they stand it."

However in the midst of disappointment, there is some gentle warmth directed towards him. This is seen when Gardner, in a cameo role as herself, sees him beyond the row of newsmen lined around her and immediately walks over to him with a caring, "Good to see you, Tony." Episodes of astonishing violence in the sense of psychological pain and suffering characterize some of the most important moments in Minnelli's cinema: whether it be in children (Tootie "killing" the snow people in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, a dead goldfish triggering Eddie's [Ronny Howard] pent-up grief over his mother in *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* [1963]), in adolescents (the anguished characters played by John Kerr in *The Cobweb* and *Tea and Sympathy* and George Hamilton in *Home From the Hill* [1960]), and in adults, famous (Kirk Douglas as Vincent Van Gogh in *Lust for life* [1956]) and low-life (Shirley MacLaine in *Some Came Running* [1958]). Two such scenes show unaccommodated hysteria and frustration that end in spectacular nervous breakdowns, both of them set in cars (Lana Turner in *The Bad and the Beautiful*, an insane Douglas subjecting a wanton Charisse to the ride of her life in *Two Weeks in Another Town* [1962]). Yet what often generates the most powerful moments in

his films-- and a vital facet perhaps undeveloped in analyses of Minnelli's work --are those which show a character performing an unexpected act of kindness for another. Sequences that evince such tenderness include, for instance, when Mrs. Smith integrates her husband back into the household by going to the piano to play "You and I" in *Meet Me in St. Louis* or in the final scene in *Home From the Hill* when Rafe (George Peppard), the dutiful but bastard son, is formally inscribed into the family by the person for whom his existence had been part of a larger pain. Though this simple gesture by Gardner to the Astaire character does not equal either of these scenes in terms of poignant impact (it happens too early in the narrative and is too fleeting for such healing power), her warmth has a dual effect. On the one hand, it bestows on Astaire an empathy, or at least a point of connection-- however brief. But on the other hand, what she does also highlights his isolation by reminding him of what he lacks: an audience, and so in the logic of this myth of integration, probably not a meaningfully intimate relationship as well.

In the "By Myself" number that follows Tony's short exchange with the porter, a tracking camera isolates him as he strolls from the train to the main terminal. Light blues and steely greys are the primary colours of

this sequence, hues that simultaneously create and reflect the melancholy feeling that pervades the number.

Yet as with the rest of the film, there is a remarkable lack of self-pity in Astaire's performance because in thorough contrast to his former roles there is a lack of ego in this one.¹⁴⁹ Therefore the sense of loneliness that he imparts has a lyrical dimension since he grasps his situation ("No one knows better that I myself/I'm by myself/alone."), even as he is quietly bent on making the best out of his isolation ("I'll try to apply myself/And teach my heart how to sing."). In this way, his sense of loneliness has a strength about it. However besides this first number never being maudlin or self-indulgent, what adds immeasurably to its lyricism is Astaire's relationship with the world. Unlike "No Strings" he does not enjoy an onto logical equality with the world (seen when, for example, another porter disturbs him by moving a luggage cart he had been leaning against as he sang). Despite this he travels through the number with an exceedingly gentle grace. Less flashy than, say, "No Strings," Astaire still manages a seamless balance between talking and singing, walking and dancing, and integrating such activities as stopping at a kiosk to flip through a book and elegantly smoking a cigarette as he voices the words while moving along the platform. At under 90 seconds, "By Myself" is

almost a wisp of a number except that its melancholic air imbues it with a delicate, but effective, weight.

Richard Corliss is right in pointing out the indelible impression "By Myself" makes, a sequence whose atmosphere haunts the rest of *The Band Wagon*. But he is wrong to describe Astaire's feeling in the number as aloof, claiming that as Astaire moves alongside the train he is "shuffling off toward a Garboesque Valhalla."¹⁵⁰ Were this true, there would be nothing lyrical in the number for there is nothing lyrical about such stolid detachment. I think Corliss is mistaking Astaire's resolve to make the best of his loneliness with the desire to be alone. The humanity of the number consists in the perseverance and vulnerability that Astaire shows, both of which come across in the introspective quality that characterizes his bittersweet performance.

What exactly, though, is the reason for Astaire's wistfulness? This is where I hold it is Harvey who better understands the feelings of the Astaire character and thus the dynamics of the number. As already expressed in the epigraph that opens this discussion on the myth of community, Harvey finds a direct cause-and-effect comparison between the older Astaire as Tony Hunter in "By Myself" (and one might say of the entire

film) and the younger Astaire as Jerry Travers in "No Strings" (and as I would argue likewise true of all of *Top Hat*). In the 1935 film he desired "No strings, no connections/No ties to my affections" and was given an imperial hermetic ego. Now in this 1953 film he is forced, as Harvey says, to "ruefully pay the consequences" for such radical self-containedness. Disconnected, Tony comes across as a broken man "not sure he could cope with anything else" or if he "is personally worthy of anyone's love."¹⁵¹

What allows Harvey to interpret "By Myself" in light of the earlier "No Strings," is how *The Band Wagon* insists this be done. Indeed, wasting no time it begins with the image of Astaire's iconographic top hat during the title sequence that, exactly parallel to *Top Hat*, segues into the first scene. From a fixed shot of his top hat, white gloves, and cane, the camera pans left to reveal that these distinguished objects are about to be auctioned. A sign advertises the sale of "Tony Hunter's personal effects," though the items are associated with Astaire's archetypal Thirties persona. To emphasize further this identification, the auctioneer announces that the items come from a renowned Hunter musical called *Swinging Down To Panama* but which is an obvious hybrid of real Astaire movies *Swing Time* (his best film

with Rogers) and *Flying Down to Rio* (the legendary film that began his partnership with her).

However what later cements this link is nothing that has anything to do with Astaire person, but with the presence of Ava Gardner. As short as her time is in the film, her presence disrupts what is the customary distinction that Classical Hollywood movies make for the spectator: that is, the conceit separating, say, the "real" person of Ava Gardner and that of Ava Gardner playing a "fictitious" character (for example as Kitty Collins in *The Killers* [1946, Siodmak]). (Stanley Cavell is but one scholar that has called attention to the complexity of this conceit by seeing how, among other things, "real" people are to some degree characters within fictions while at times it might happen that "fictitious" figures come alive and play a real part in the world.¹⁵²) Ordinarily her presence would take readjustment on our part if it were not for the movie encouraging us to regard Tony Hunter as Fred Astaire. By having Gardner appear as herself the viewer is once again made to read the film in terms of "real" persons being shown instead of "fictitious" figures being acted. Such a signalling device is similar to when Astaire played "Fred" in *The Sky's the Limit* and mentioned the names of former partners Rogers and Hayworth during the

course of the movie. Still, it is important to grasp that although we are guided to perceive Hunter as standing for Astaire's persona, he is never simply signifies it. There are, of course, aspects of Tony Hunter not wholly identical to the "real" Fred Astaire, and indeed the character emerges as a three-dimensional figure on its own. Yet, as I said above, it is due to this extra-filmic dimension that largely explains why this particular role is so rounded.

"By Myself" is not only shot within an isolating tracking camera, but filmed in a single continuous take.

The two shots succeeding it are very different, and together they form a sequence that is the first of Tony Hunter's noteworthy progressions from isolation to collaboration. The second shot connects the first to the third by providing the required transition visually as well as in terms of sound. This shot begins after he enters the major terminal as the song he croons to himself tapers into a fading hum, and lasts until he hears the Martons' clamorous welcome and then darts off-screen in their direction. Meanwhile the camera photographs him within the Grand Central Station crowd, thus having abandoned the tracking movements that emphasized his solitariness. Besides his being filmed in an animated space with other people and receiving

such a boisterous reception from his "fan club" that their shouts fill the air, the colours are warmer and in this way a transition has taken place. The third shot completes this transformation, as it consists of his lively reunion with his high-spirited pals.

Even some of the elements found in "By Myself" are transformed in this third shot. One is the light blue clothes worn by Tony that were of a piece with its melancholy atmosphere. Yet since Lester and Lily are wearing the same colour, what had connoted loneliness is now used to join Tony with friends who enthusiastically love him. Another element is a kiosk located on the left side of the screen as Tony gives and receives loud affection from his friends, recalling the one he distractedly stopped at during his solo. As Feuer writes, his antics with the Martons create an audience from the passersby around them.¹⁵³ Earlier as Tony travelled alongside the platform, he was featured going down a red carpet that contrasted with (and therefore highlighted) the sadder or more remote colours found in the *mise-en-scène*, as well as not having had the "red carpet bit" despite the right furnishings and the press being there. However in a felicitous turn of events, he could have hardly had a warmer greeting than the one he eventually gets.

Each succeeding time the Astaire character goes from isolation to collaboration, he attracts a larger audience: more passersby plus the engaging shoeshine man during "Shine On your Shoes," followed by the show's unemployed cast in "I Love Louisa." Still, despite his performances drawing increasingly bigger crowds romantic love eludes him. *The Band Wagon*, in a manner that posits heterosexual romance as the ultimate success, waits until its closing sequence to link such love within the progression of this specific myth of integration. It is only as the new show Tony produced, directed, and features in is declared a hit that he simultaneously receives a declaration of love from Gaby.

Actually the fact that the show is a smash is suggested even before Gaby, cast, and crew surprise him with a heartfelt display of appreciation (as seen not only in the quality of the "Girl Hunt" number but in the applause it gets afterward). In this way the final coming together of the central heterosexual couple caps the series of evolving progressions from isolation to collaboration. But to emphasize this development in *Hunter*, however, the film employs a kind of palindromic narrative structure in which "By Myself" is repeated. For just as the film opens with him trying to brush away the blues and making the best of his loneliness only to

experience the love of friends, it ends in the same way except that his friends have grown in number with one of them desiring to share her life with him.

Part II

Integration Myths Two and Three: Spontaneity Related to The Myths of Popular Entertainment and the Archetypal Astaire Persona

The old is associated with spontaneity (Astaire in the "improvised" shoeshine routine) while the new, at the very moment when it is praised by the Fabray-Levant writing team, is revealed as ossified (Jack Buchanan eats the same sandwich, prepared the same way, after every performance). Throughout the film this essential dichotomy returns, always prejudicing the audience in favour of old-fashioned entertainment-- and entertainers.

Rick Altman, The American Film Musical

Parallel to "By Myself" *The Band Wagon* contains one other musical palindrome. Insofar as Minnelli employs the otherwise melancholy "By Myself" to initiate the progression linking Tony's success as a performer with the experience of not only being accepted into a group but realizing romantic love, he uses "That's Entertainment" to illustrate the transformative movement regarding a second myth of integration. This one includes the progression from elite art to popular entertainment. During the first rendition of the song

elite art sneakily appropriates popular entertainment in the name of popular entertainment, but the second rendition corrects this. The lyrics of the song level Sophocles and Shakespeare by placing their plays alongside "the clown with his pants falling down" and plots "simply teeming with sex" thereby democratizing all theatre as characteristic of "the American way." But as already observed in his earlier musicals, collapsing conventional boundaries (like gender difference at the conclusion of *The Pirate*, imagination in both love and work in *An American in Paris*) or at least revealing how arbitrary they are (like the artificially crafted geographies of men and women in *Meet Me in St. Louis*), is also characteristic of Minnelli. The same is true of Astaire's "outlaw" dance style, notes Jerome Delamater, for despite tap being markedly emphasized in his choreography it is usually fused with elements of ballroom and ballet. Of Astaire's dance fusion, he writes:

He was particularly fond of abrupt transitions from flowing movements to sudden stops, posing for a moment before proceeding to the next step-- stop and go, freeze and melt --a style adopted wholesale by later choreographers. 'He used balletic turns,' says Cholly Atkins, 'but came out of them with a jazz kick and slide.'¹⁵⁴

The overall tendency of the American musical is toward an alleged equality in which popular entertainment is nonetheless privileged over elite art. Throughout The Hollywood Musical Feuer discusses this process. To illustrate this bias within equality as well as how popular entertainment partakes of high art for its existence, she notes, for example, how characters who are set up as amateurs are favoured over those who are professionals; how everyday music forms such as swing, torch, or jazz are presented as dynamic over the static quality of opera; how all the technology, engineering, and planning that go into creating a musical routine is erased by a constructed spontaneity (*bricolage*) within the numbers; and how often narratives are set in folkloric locales such as small towns or backstage circles.

The US musical attempts to manufacture the feel of folk art because, as Feuer argues, it equates spontaneity with the "natural"-- with vitality and being alive.¹⁵⁵

In Hogue's Seventies essay, he argued that *The Band Wagon* is about "breaking down some of the distinctions between art and reality,"¹⁵⁶ though, as I am positing, it is important to know that it first does this by having elite art sneakily appropriate popular entertainment in the name of the latter. But if it levels Oedipus Rex

("where the chap kills his father and causes a lot of bother") from classical tragedy to *grand guignol*, and it then does so, albeit humorously, with Hamlet's final act ("where the ghost and the prince meet and everyone ends in mincemeat"), what secures the status or position of elite art enough to appropriate popular entertainment? Within the lyrics themselves, nothing; rather, it is the end toward which the song is employed that determines its meaning. Here as Altman finds, the song is used as a "rhetorical ploy" by the Martons and particularly Cordova to convince a leery Hunter to go highbrow by taking the lead in a modern musical form of Faust. But after the play lays an egg (the first "Band Wagon") and then is resurrected and becomes a successful song-and-dance revue under the direction of Tony (the second "Band Wagon"), "That's Entertainment" is sung again. The success and all-around experience of the second "Band Wagon," however, altogether transforms the meaning of the song as it is reprised by the play's performers and crew:

The finale constitutes a correlative to this first, falsely old-fashioned version. This time the entire cast sings the song to celebrate not Astaire's conversion but their own. Like the film spectators whom they are addressing, the members of the cast have all abandoned the pretension of high art and

climbed aboard the band wagon.¹⁵⁷

In this way, the "natural" or "reality" and art become synonymous (at least relatively speaking since most of the movie takes place in the artificial environment of the stage), reversing the notion of art featured in the first rendition of "That's Entertainment." Now high art is sneakily appropriated by popular entertainment in the name of popular entertainment. "That's Entertainment" is not completely analogous to "By Myself" since the intentions and thus the meanings differ in each rendition. Still, that the movie has two circular yet transformative structural patterns is expressive of its synthetic arrangement.

By identifying elite art with isolation and popular entertainment with collaboration, Minnelli joins together these two integration myths. He reinforces the link between these dual progressions by associating elite art and isolation with the "new" (in vogue) and popular entertainment and collaboration with the "old" (archaic), as Altman describes.¹⁵⁸ Yet since the movie explicitly deals with not only making relevant Astaire's Thirties persona for audiences of the Fifties but showing that he represents a personality whose values and style are timeless and true, Minnelli cleverly retains facets of the legendary singer-dancer while

reinventing others in order to adhere to these integration myths. Consequently Astaire is subtly transformed-- keeping his best qualities, expelling his worst, and acquiring attractive new ones --while making it appear as if the film were simply calling for a return to his archetypal persona.

To be precise, nothing could be more alien to Astaire's self-contained Jerry Travers than the notion of collaboration and finding success (meaningful work, romantic love, and self-esteem) through the joy of being part of a group. Minnelli is able to pull off this radical change in Astaire's persona (and thus conferring on him depth and humanity) partially by clothing this alteration within the singer-dancer's signature seamless skill and elegance, and partially by the alchemic power of these myths of integration through the qualities they represent. From this, another myth of integration is created in *The Band Wagon*: the supposed regression rather than progression towards Astaire's supposed persona of the Thirties. Yet nowhere is the radical change in Astaire's persona more profoundly affected than in the style of relationship he has with the Charisse character. Here in Part II, I will first delve into how *The Band Wagon* constructs the progression from elite art to popular entertainment and the ways it

juxtaposes this movement with isolation and collaboration and "new" and "old" via the idea of spontaneity. To examine this I will centre my analysis around two contrasting sequences-- that concerning the disastrous first "Band Wagon" versus a number performed during the second show ("I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plans"). Afterward, to see how love and identity are constructed in the central heterosexual couple I will analyse "Dancing in the Dark."

From Damnation to Delectation:

Art and Nature in Each Version of the "Band Wagon"

Everything that can be analysed in comparing the differences that separate the first and second renditions of "The Band Wagon" flows from the converse patterns through which they are represented in relation to each other. To represent the first rendition many scenes of rehearsal are shown but none of the finished production, while the opposite is true of the second. Here *The Band Wagon* exhibits an elegantly logical narrative economy, since the rehearsals for the highbrow, Cordova-directed rendition reveal no spontaneity thus eliminating the need to show a final piece of theatre that has been carefully foregrounded as doomed. With an equivalent structural precision, the "I Love Louisa" number makes unnecessary montage sequences

of practice sessions since, as the product of spontaneity itself, it shows the Hunter-inspired rendition as already entertaining. The identification of spontaneity with nature (the former being proof of the latter), is the association the film fixes upon to declare the reason why the first "Band Wagon" fails whilst the second one succeeds. Under Cordova's leadership, a far too excessive amount of coordination is needed to realize his vision of a musical full of "stature and meaning" (not to mention, damnation scenes). His lofty or elevated approach to entertainment is descriptive of his "Band Wagon"--literally: overwrought, over-indulgent, as well as over-cerebral. Too much control, ironically, ends with chaos not coordination, since it leaves out the human by repressing freedom and bottling up creativity. The rehearsal scenes are framed in a comic syntax, but they are also wreathed in the Halloween colours of black and orange suggesting hellish reality and the unnatural.

Even the number of scenes that form the movie's rehearsal section total an ill-fated thirteen: (1) Cordova's speech about the stage being their home during the four weeks of practice; (2) a montage of female dancers auditioning before Paul and Lester; (3) Cordova trying out some smoke effects; (4) Tony and Paul

practising a bit of choreography; (5) Lily attempting to get a moment of Cordova's time; (6) Tony moving amongst a wave of dancing pairs in a number being rehearsed; (7) Cordova again trying out some smoke effects; (8) Cordova coaching Tony on his acting ("I want the whole eight-eighths!"); (9) Tony accidentally dropping Gaby and then blowing up before walking out of practice; (10) Lester and Lily arguing with each other; (11) the disastrous dress rehearsal three days before opening night; (12) a tired Tony and Gaby interrupted by Paul and being made to practice a dance step; (13) Tony and Gaby trying to dance to "You and the Night and the Music" as the surrounding set goes up in smoke and they can only laugh.

Probably the most cogent example of over-control leading to chaos is that of the scene of the disastrous dress rehearsal three days before opening night. Orange and harlequin-style black and white colours fill this run-through of the play's first act finale (the richest concentration is found on Cordova himself with his devil-like formal suit, white shirt and carnation, and black satin cape with orange lining). In a long shot as the camera pans and booms back, Cordova directs the action while enthusiastically remarking on the effect which the colourful sets and costumes, heavy music, and

dramatic lighting are having ("It will be a memorable moment. Memorable! Ah, yes, this is real theatre.") In other words, the "new" musical is depicted as one where human beings simply figure as decorative material within a garish tableau that itself serves to illustrate a grand theme or moral conflict. As Mast says, "In Jeffrey Cordova's show everything performs except the performers" and to the degree the "new" musical is not organised around human action, it is dependent on engineering.¹⁵⁹ But as Cordova begins to instruct the stage technicians to raise or lower various flats on the set, he quickly has the situation out of control. Nothing better symbolizes the chaos that proceeds from the values of high art than when in the midst of pandemonium, he is suspended in the air by a wire from a boom that catches his cape.

Besides the pretension that is linked to elite art, the film also associates possessiveness and a dictatorial bearing with it. The idea of hierarchy is thus doubly tied to elite art-- hammy catch-phrases aside ("There is no difference between Bill Shakespeare's immortal words and Bill Robinson's immortal feet."). If Cordova's authoritarianism is tenderized by Buchanan's characteristic "wit, energy, and somewhat neurotic charm,"¹⁶⁰ it is left to the gifted but impatient Paul to

typify more directly the kind of individual devoted to the values of elite art. The dictatorial bearing that comes from elite art is put across in his relationship with Gaby. Unlike Tony, Paul practically never addresses her by the informal "Gaby" but calls her by what is probably a constructed stage name (the French "Gabrielle Gerard"). That Paul is over-protective of her dance career and does not think she should waste herself in a popular show appears when Cordova first broaches the idea to Paul of doing the Faust "The Band Wagon" ("No, no, she's too important to ballet!"). And when Tony offers to resurrect the failed "Band Wagon" by putting it in an "old" song-and-dance type format, Paul naturally assumes that Gaby will join him in leaving the company:

PAUL: This kind of leaves us out.

GABY: Why?

PAUL: Well, with Tony doing the dances, it's not going to be my kind of show. Yours either. I don't want you to do it.

GABY: I wouldn't think of leaving the show, Paul.

PAUL: Now, listen, I've worked much too hard on your career to throw it away

on-

GABY: It's my career, and I want to stay.

The experience of working with Tony has humanized Gaby.

When she is first introduced in the narrative, Gaby is performing a ballet ("The Beggar's Waltz") in which she appears lifeless in the sense of being cold and ornamental. But her integration into the world of popular entertainment-- and thus the human --begins through a "renewal of contact with common folk in Central Park" followed by another experience in which Tony is crucially present: as part of the chorus in "I Love Louisa." In moving to an isolated space in the room to be with Paul in the "I Love Louisa" sequence, she had removed herself from the vibrant group of which she had just been a chorus member and returned to the lonelier world of elite art-- "and the camera frames the couple apart from the mass." But when she rejects Paul's control, she takes "the side of the collective effort which will produce the successful musical."¹⁶¹

The Band Wagon would seem to vilify Cordova-- or at least Paul. The closest it comes to doing so with Paul is when Lester, who though slightly manic is the movie's moral centre, says to Tony, "What a rat!" It is even kinder towards Cordova, linking him with values that it

opposes but still regarding him with remarkable sympathy. As Mueller remarks, Cordova suffers from an excess of flamboyance and unrealism rather than of ego.¹⁶² The character of Cordova who "doesn't see any better than Oedipus" until his treatment of "The Band Wagon" fails,¹⁶³ was said to have been based on personalities ranging from Orson Welles, José Ferrer, Noel Coward, and even MGM studio boss Dore Schary. While not necessarily trying to exclude what might be truth in any of these claims, it is the flamboyance director Cordova exudes that suggests that he stands in for campy director Vincente Minnelli. Flamboyance of personality is linked to flamboyance of the camera in two of the most pivotal scenes of rehearsal.

Not insignificantly, these scenes are the ones filled with the most disorder and include the disastrous dress rehearsal three days before opening night mentioned above, and the one which features "You and the Night and the Music." However when numbers from the Hunter-directed "Band Wagon" are later shown, the camera work is low-key and reflects both the balance and simplicity that characterize the material, as well as allowing the focus to be on the performers rather than on showy camera movements. Insofar as Cordova suggests Minnelli (and Minnelli's "boom happy" flamboyant camera style--

"his love of mobility, of snooping and sailing and drifting and drooping his camera booms and dollies"¹⁶⁴ -- connected with the ostentatious feeling of Cordova's show and the way it is photographed suggest this), then the movement towards an Astaire-like choreographic style represents a "technical self-effacement" for Minnelli.¹⁶⁵

This is one of the clearest aspects of the movie in which Minnelli appears to acknowledge his part in contributing to the state of Astaire's career 10 years before, and his effort now to make up for it.

"I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plans" exhibits all the qualities lacking during the rehearsal scenes: balance and simplicity to be sure, but also those of effortlessness, spontaneity, and rapport. Basically, it is Astaire and Buchanan performing an old soft-shoe in top hats, white ties, and tails, but the "relaxed cool" of the number¹⁶⁶ is so deeply satisfying that only two pros could make it seem so "natural." In its own way, however, it is actually as carefully engineered as "You and the Night and the Music" but the difference is that its engineering (concealed and unconcealed) is aimed toward the performers rather than lofty concepts or special effects. The number is remarkably subdued even without comparing it to that earlier pyrotechnic scene.

Above all, this is seen in the languid striding back

and forth across the stage by the pair, their easy-going musical phrasing and crooning style in sync with the way they move, and their placement within a set design having understated horizontal bands that blend walls and floor.

Harmony (and what is more, equality) between the men is conveyed by their identical dress, coordinated steps and gestures, and being framed within a conjunctive two-shot. And despite the camera travelling between long and medium shots even inside the same take, it never calls attention to itself and displays a fluidness which reflects the tone of the number. For these reasons, a feeling of evenness or smoothness so rhythmic that what Astaire and Buchanan do seems "natural" is created. This contrasts with the scene, for instance, where Cordova takes Tony aside and makes him yell his lines ("Did you ever try spreading ideals on a cracker?") or the one in which Tony accidentally drops Gaby while performing a dance lift. At the conclusion of "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plans," the feeling of spontaneity is set up similar in similar manner to that of the cake walk routine seen in *Meet Me in St. Louis* ("Under the Bamboo Tree"). Just as there is a lack of coordination at times between Esther and Tootie that is specifically engineered to give the number a "natural"

sense, the two performers tossing their top hats to the floor yet failing to catch them with their feet achieves the same effect. This failed action, though, is also of a piece with the subject matter of the song which is about a love affair that fails to catch. Shrugging off their "mistake," they exit to the wing arm-in-arm "in a final a note of epicene irony."¹⁶⁷

Art and Nature in the Construction of
Heterosexuality in "Dancingin the Dark"

I have written that *The Band Wagon* shifts from elite art sneakily appropriating popular entertainment in the name of the latter for the purposes of Cordova's show, to popular entertainment sneakily appropriating elite art in the name of popular entertainment for the purposes of Hunter's show. Some instances of this second progression include Tony deciding to sell his art collection to finance his "laughs and entertainment" revue-style rendition of "The Band Wagon" (pointedly one of the works is a Degas painting of a ballerina), and another is the "The Girl Hunt" jazz ballet that I will examine at the end of the chapter. Though the film may be about popular entertainment triumphing over elite art, since each depends on the other it is hardly an uncomplicated victory for the first no matter how "natural" or "spontaneous" it is represented to be.

The same is true for the extra-filmic dimension of *The Band Wagon* for Minnelli would not be in the position to renew Astaire's star persona had it not been for the director's "artsy" and flamboyant sensibility that made for successful movies. Not for nothing did Louis Marcorelles consider Minnelli to be the "Oscar Wilde of the camera."¹⁶⁸ Examples of his sensibility span *An American in Paris* (indeed he, along with members of the Freed unit, was responsible for transforming the Hollywood musical for over two decades), his adaptation of great "highbrow" literature (*Madame Bovary* [1949]), and his helping to make a "lowbrow" genre like melodrama (*The Bad and the Beautiful*) respectable through a style that was as classy as it was over-the-top. Then, again, Astaire himself depended on elements of ballroom and ballet dancing not only in his own style as Delamater observed, but most of all in his romantic duets with his balletic-trained partners (Vera-Ellen, Leslie Caron, Charisse in *Silk Stockings*, and Audrey Hepburn).¹⁶⁹

The mutually dependent relationship between elite art and popular entertainment is played down in every area of the film except for the coming together of the central heterosexual couple. Here the split between showbiz hoofer Tony and prima ballerina Gaby is not simply represented but heavily emphasized. "Can you and

I really dance together?," she asks him. To find out they go to a neutral setting away from the stage environment ("our little sweat box of the arts" in Tony's description). Taking a horse-drawn carriage, they end up at a non-artificial setting (Central Park) where they accommodate, rather than attempt to appropriate, the style of the other. Their success in work and their falling in love mean that they must, through the syntax of dance, map out a mature space in their growing relationship. The number is "Dancing in the Dark," and it occurs in a space that is as much neutral as it is utopian, for Tony's classical modern and Gaby's classical ballet will find a point of Classicism where they can fuse yet remain themselves--in radical contrast to both the utopian space and Classicism that defined, say, "Cheek to Cheek" in *Top Hat*. In this way, it is as if Minnelli is subtly content to hint at, even as he downplays, the mutual dependence of the separate spheres of "high" and "low" art--except when it is expressive of character-defining attributes between a man and woman in heterosexual romance. In this number, he arranges the movements between Tony and Gaby in a manner which suggests the ideal of loving relationship propounded by Cavell and referred to in Chapter 3, namely, respecting individual differences so as not to cast one's partner into one's

own image.

Unlike, for instance, the numbers in the Astaire-Rogers series in which the duo move from meeting to courtship to consummation, the dancing between the already acquainted Tony and Gaby conveys that during its two minutes forty-six seconds they go from "getting to know one another" to "reaching a peak of passion."¹⁷⁰ Even before they dance, the "naturalism" of the setting is foregrounded which allows their actions in Central Park to erupt "spontaneously" and with seeming intuition of the other's movements (Tony: "Oh, look Trees!" Gaby: "Oh, yes, I remember now, dimly, trees. And isn't that called 'grass'?").

From such an undesigning space will come actions expressed through their dancing that go beyond suggesting equality between them, because they relate to each other in a way that allows them to thrive as persons while they fuse together as a couple. Such a perfect model of heterosexuality is thus linked to the "natural" as opposed to the imperfect heterosexuality that elite art creates: Paul's dictatorial bearing, the fighting going on between Lester and Lily, and the bachelor Cordova who does not demonstrate the least bit of sexual desire (and thus could either be read as stereotypically English and/or as homosexual according

to one set of Hollywood codes of the day).

She begins the number with a pirouette, where upon he follows with a spin that is gentle and tentative. He does an old shuffle and shimmy and she copies. This brings them to a position where they mirror one another, but they hesitate to get too close (they keep their arms and hands to themselves) and behave a bit feistily towards one another. As they start to spin around together they do so as equals, and with this they touch as she performs some extravagant ballet movements that he enables her to do. That is, Tony supports Gaby to be herself, to do her thing, and for this to happen he has to yield territory and permit her a central stage. (Charisse's long legs were often used to great effect in numbers, but this one highlights her arms as well.) As Dyer relates:

. . .he spins her out or pulls up in ways that allow her to flourish, to extend exhilaratingly upwards or outwards, with an energy and expansiveness at odds with the contained and inward movement associated with pretty femininity in showbiz dance. This is not to say that her movements connote masculinity, they are far too graceful for that; rather they suggest the ideal of womanhood confidently flowering in the ground of male support.¹⁷¹

Now with jazzy beats the emphasis shifts to more modern dance and she comes to him. Their dancing is upbeat, sophisticated, cool--as when the pair yearn to the side with arms flung out in showbiz style. Then for the remainder of the number there is a fusion of ballet and modern dance to the extent that it is difficult to say where one stops and the other begins. Meanwhile they orchestrate a fusion around each other's differences. Tellingly as they move furthest from the camera they achieve total fusion, and literally fill out space as they go. Tony and Gaby are thoroughly at ease with each other, their confidence together forming or underlining the bursts of crescendo which punctuate the music. The music also fuses here the dance styles of Tony and Gaby, and is heard in the yelps of jazz and the yearning strings. Finally, at the close of the number they dance up a white flight of steps to return to the waiting carriage. As the soundtrack swells, they separate though they remain in sync as they move in parallel up the stairs therefore acknowledging their differences yet remain one in the manner whereby they create a passionate space. Their dance at the finale is at first show style before finishing on ballet. Significantly, the number does not close with them in an embrace or kissing but radiating a rapturous intimacy between them as they sit next to each other in the carriage holding

hands in silence.

Of the incredibly beautiful "Dancing in the Dark" Harvey says its "spare beauty" is director "Minnelli's own rebuke to the dry-ice-drenched couplings he'd done in other musicals and satirized herein 'You and the Night and the Music.'"¹⁷² The number is a leading instance of his technical self-effacement in the movie, an effect further underscored by its location in the narrative (towards the end within the disastrous rehearsal scenes). Nonetheless, as the majority of the numbers in *Meet Me in St. Louis* prove (to mention one example), not all Minnelli numbers are florid and flamboyant. Such exceptions to the rule are hardly true of the way Astaire is constructed in relation to Charisse in the number, however. Even as he enjoys a seamless conjunction with the world and a graceful skill, his Classicism does not derive from a hermetic ego that is impossibly self-contained but comes out of a developing communion with someone who likewise enjoys these qualities. In other words the sense of fit and fluidity he exudes in the number only occurs because he goes out of himself to enable her to be herself-- and she reciprocates (which is the reason why she, too, possesses the same sense of fit and fluidity). There is not a single moment in *Top Hat* when he behaves this way

with Rogers-- not even "Isn't It a Lovely Day (to Be Caught in the Rain)?"

Just once in Astaire's core musicals with Rogers (*The Gay Divorcee*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, and *Shall We Dance*) does he reveal a depth otherwise omitted from the superficial elegance that was his star persona. This is seen in what Croce labels "the dance of dances" and why I said earlier that *Swing Time* was the best Fred and Ginger musical, namely, the "Never Gonna Dance" number near the end of the film.¹⁷³ In it, he displays neither an impossible nor a humane Classicism but a lost expression that arises from Romantic pain and yearning.

After he breaks his word to stop gambling and accidentally introduces Rogers to a fiancée he no longer loves, she decides to forget Astaire by wedding a bandleader. Miserable, with the song's lyrics poignant and strangely surreal in a way reflective of a shattered mind, he declares that since he can no longer dance with her he will never dance again. As Mueller writes, "Never Gonna Dance" is about two people in love "who have little more to say to each other but who cannot bear to part."¹⁷⁴ Though he tries to win her back by having her dance with him through a series of snatches of the songs and/ or dances that recall happy memories between them ("Pick Yourself Up," "The Way You Look

Tonight," "The Waltz in Swing Time"), time and again he fails. The number closes with her literally exiting out of his life, leaving Astaire looking forlorn and emptied out. *Swing Time* ends with Astaire and Rogers together, but this number anticipates the grimmer Forties musicals (where he sometimes does not enjoy happy endings), and consequently the mood of melancholy felt in *The Band Wagon*. Yet *Swing Time* was made at the height of the team's popularity at the box office, and I would like to feel that for Astaire's performance Minnelli is not only responding to the singer-dancer's World War II era films, but perhaps something as well from the unforgettable glimpse of an Astaire who was more vulnerable and disconnected, as seen in this 1936 film.

Part III

The Grand Synthesis: Heterosexuality in "The Girl Hunt"

Suddenly, all the pieces fitted together.

Astaire as Rod Riley in "The Girl Hunt"

This final discussion concludes not only my treatment of *The Band Wagon*, but my study of heterosexual identity and love in the film musicals of Astaire and Minnelli. Throughout this chapter I have compared and contrasted the way each artist shows heterosexuality as expressed in the psychology of their characters and the manner

their creations move in the world, their signature camera styles, and the iconography or recurrent themes that run throughout their work. From this, I have analysed the effect each artist seems to have had on the other as seen in *The Band Wagon*. Because so much of the movie begs to be read in terms of Astaire's career and all of the changes to his persona, judging what impact each man had upon the other was necessarily filtered through the extra-filmic angle regarding Astaire's wartime era movies and the part that Minnelli played. The changes to each artist directly reshaped the central heterosexual couple's construction. I argued that under Minnelli's direction Astaire acquired a depth heretofore absent in his *Top Hat* persona (aside from the example seen in *Swing Time*). Besides bestowing on him a fuller humanity, his amorous relationship with Charisse was collaborative rather than one where he consumed her.

In this way, the beauty of their dancing truly equals or reflects the beauty of their relationship as suggested in their movements. Meanwhile I held that under Astaire's influence Minnelli was given balance and an organic quality regarding the relationship between substance and style in the construction of love and art (elements that are inseparable in the movie). Thus Astaire gave Minnelli's work a certain technical and

thematic humility, and Astaire's not too distant predicament also provided Minnelli with an actor whom he could use to convey the faint hint of sadness felt beneath his musicals.

Two types of heterosexuality are presented in *The Band Wagon*: the first is associated with elite art and is characterized by traits like a dictatorial bearing, friction, and the mind over the (rest of the) body; the second is associated with popular entertainment and is characterized by relational equality, unity gained through difference, and "natural" harmony conveyed through "spontaneity." Popular entertainment and the values it represents triumph in the film both in terms of the revue-style version of "The Band Wagon" that becomes a hit and the form of heterosexuality that prevails. Nevertheless, Minnelli reveals the mutual dependence between each form of theatre mostly in implicit ways except for displaying the relationship between hoofer Astaire and prima ballerina Charisse.

Here rather than obliterating difference between them by subtly having one convert to the style of the other (the strategy at the centre of Astaire's numbers with Rogers), it is emphasized in the caring fashion each person enables the other's self-expression to flourish.

(Respecting difference is, of course, itself a triumph

of the values of popular entertainment.) Thus whereas in *Top Hat* Astaire applied a romancy charm towards Rogers to mask a swamping Classicism that eliminated difference (that is, her personality), the movies of Minnelli I have analysed could not be more opposite for they are crucially structured around difference. Yet *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *The Pirate* formulated diametric viewpoints as to the situation of gender difference within heterosexuality (gender difference being the constitutional base of heterosexuality). In the first one difference was viewed as a source of plenitude and pain, yet was ultimately seen as worth maintaining; in the second difference was magnified so far that it collapsed, this implosion yielding a relationship built on supplementary arrangement rather than a complementary one thus offering a model of relational love and identity perhaps unique within Hollywood cinema. Both approaches to difference might be said to be utopian, but what both films had in common was showing that difference-- at least as put across in the narrative worlds of these musicals-- is socially constructed.

Meanwhile, the proto-Forties image of Astaire that I investigated in *Carefree* and the one demonstrated in the wartime era *The Sky's the Limit*, showed him dealing with difference only when his charm was undermined, and with

it his singular and superior onto logical status. Once he was reduced to being an ordinary mortal, though, he failed in the sphere of heterosexual romance with each musical presenting a separate reason for this, yet both having to do with difference. In *Carefree* his self-absorption-- one that came from profound self-delusion --prevented him from seeing Rogers's love, while in *The Sky's the Limit* his flighty individualism-- one that arose from a fundamental personal insecurity --made it impossible for him to deal with the commitment that mature love demands. In spite of slapped-on "happy endings" in both films, they could not be more contrary in the way difference was handled. In the first movie, Rogers willingly erased herself (ceding her characteristic sassiness and bite to him) once she finally won his attention and love; in the second, Leslie walked out on him once she understood that there is no "saving" the one you love as long as that person has weak (or false) ego boundaries and refuses to develop. These Astaire films raise such disquieting dynamics within heterosexual romantic bonds that their "happy endings" come off as reactionary (*Carefree*) or unconvincing (*The Sky's the Limit*). (Of course, it must be said that these issues related to difference are so large that they transcend heterosexual arrangements and can be refitted to homosexual and bisexual arrangements

along lines besides those of gender. Indeed some would propose that maintaining difference is as vital to these relationships as they are to any other.¹⁷⁵⁾

"The Girl Hunt" jazz ballet near the close of *The Band Wagon* is a kind of grand synthesis of the models of heterosexuality conveyed in *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *The Pirate*. Within the film, though, it is equally about the competing types of romantic bonds between men and women formerly associated with "high" and "low" art and which are engagingly played out in a camp form of noir-ish sexual theatre. Of all the movie's numbers, this one calls attention to itself more than the others for various reasons: its placement in the narrative as the showstopper which caps the successful string of new "Band Wagon" numbers; its location in the plot as the last musical sequence except for those that are reprises ("By Myself," "That's Entertainment"); its length as the longest number (almost 12 minutes); and its presentation as a contained mini-film having not only a beginning, middle and end, but a palindromic structure resembling the larger film. These formal qualities are important for understanding "The Girl Hunt" number, but they do not explain its crucial function in the movie fully. In this, the final part of my thesis, I will discuss the two aspects of the number stated above. At the same

time I will show the ways this sense of it as a synthesis of Minnelli's earlier treatments of heterosexual love and identity and it acting as a summary of the competing types of art and amour in this film, fit the archetypal Astaire persona as it is effectively transformed.

The full title of the number is "The Girl Hunt: A Murder Mystery in Jazz," and it spoofs the decadent Mickey Spillane pulp fiction paperbacks of its time. With their contempt for women, senseless glorification of violence, and hysterical but brutal heterosexual machismo, these cheap works featuring detective Mike Hammer might seem too easy a target since within themselves they are their own parody. But whereas Robert Aldrich would "stand on its head" the cynical greed and stupid barbarism of Hammer by a distillation of the private eye's core characteristics in the slightly later *Kiss Me Deadly*, Minnelli's approach is constructive. Cleverly using a camp aesthetics toward this end, Minnelli takes what are familiar gender stereotypes of Spillane's literature (and noir in general) and the overall atmosphere and iconography from the writer's work (and noir in general) for his own progressive outlook on identity and love between men and women. Astaire is cast as Detective Rod Riley with

Charisse, in dual roles, as the Blonde ingénue and the Brunette spiderwoman. That the number is set in a Spillane world is signalled at the opening as a stage billboard featuring covers of Hammer-sounding titles like Dames Kill Me, She Had to Die, and The Girl Hunt is split in half by a tommy gun. As it parts, it reveals a lonely, nighttime cityscape. After just having solved a crime, Riley enters the number speaking in the voice-over often typical of film noir. With the quick introduction of the fleeing Blonde, the Brunette he will encounter in looking for the Blonde, and the violence that surrounds both women, the primary facets of this genre are present (including the incomprehensible "logic" of the plot at times).

From George Balanchine's "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" (in the 1936 On Your Toes) to Michael Kidd's Guys and Dolls (1950), a gangster story set to ballet and jazz was nothing new, yet locating a jazz ballet dealing with lust and Murder Inc. in a camp aesthetic was. Employing such a syntax destabilizes all gender constructions and gives the masculinity and femininity shown a put-on, performative quality. Examples of theatricality having to do with masculinity range from the ultra-cool, tough guy way the Detective lights his cigarettes, the exaggerated manner he says "That bullet was meant for

me!," and the eye-popping expression he shows after each time he is beat up and then regains consciousness. But masculinity as performance goes beyond the representation of the Detective. One example is the subway scene where the Blonde suddenly appears and she swoon-dances with the Detective as mobsters spar behind them. Many iconographic components of heterosexual masculinity found in film noir are displayed: guns, trench coats, fedora hats, and the thrill of action and danger as encoded manly sensations. But the violence is literally choreographed or denaturalized, as when one combative pair try to shoot each other while performing perfectly synchronized cartwheels.

As Walter Benjamin found, the dandy and the detective are heirs to the *flâneur* (the strolling observer of urban life who regards with detachment the metropolis as a source of entertainment), thus exposing the sensitive fop and the steely gumshoe (both very much "botanist[s] on asphalt") as being of the same blood.¹⁷⁶ In this way the dandy who is so descriptive of the Astaire persona--his marginality, bachelorhood, knowledge of the city, self-containment --allows him to play a detective with what may otherwise seem unusual ease. Indeed, this was a major reason why I compared Astaire's Jerry Travers character to Sam Spade and Mike Hammer in Chapters 2 and

3. However by Minnelli placing the number in a camp register, not only is the masculinity of Astaire as a detective destabilized but implicitly Astaire as the dandy as well.

Like the Detective the Blonde and Brunette are gender stereotypes basic to noir. The first one is the helpless, innocent woman who it turns out is actually the killer. The other is the woman that the viewer has no illusions about, namely, the femme fatale. The latter almost always meets her end in death, but she is constructed with enough power that she succeeds in, or else comes perilously close to, destroying the Detective. What the Blonde and Brunette share is sexual magnetism-- whether understated in the Blonde or brazen in the Brunette --that they use as their weapon. Once again, the camp aspect of the number heightens each type only to destabilize them, and this is never more true than in the sexual dimension of the sequence.

When, for example, a clue takes the Detective to a fashionable Fifth Avenue-like salon de couture, he enters a large chamber saturated with brilliant purples.

He comes in, mid-frame and towards the spectator, beneath a series of door-framed arches which suggest vaginal walls. The room is filled, oddly enough, with wealthy and elderly female patrons who remain motionless

and expressionless in contrast to animated, sex-hungry female models. On both sides of the door are ship figureheads of women hung just as if they were mounted deer-- they are even adorned with antlers to accent this. At once surreal and queer (in both senses of the word), this bit of the set design lampoons noir heterosexual male ideas of women as trophies and decoration. And that the only men in the stylish salon stand under these figureheads in a pose like hunters in evening dress only underscores this effect-- the "Girl Hunt" indeed.

In the Detective's full-length dance with the Blonde the music is romantic and starry-eyed, the dance is slow and balletic, and the emotional tone is rapturous. Despite the violence swirling about them, they seem oblivious to it as if they commune in a different world. A variety of aspects combine to give the dance a polished feeling, an exquisite show of two bodies in gorgeous sync. Never is any part of the Detective or the Blonde's body emphasized in away that disturbs the rhythm of their bodies either singularly or in unison. Yet despite this apparent physical accord (manifested in their movements through, say, moments of mirroring), on closer view, this effect is really the product of a far more different-- and opposite-- arrangement. In actuality it

is the result of her willingly giving herself to him, and him willingly taking what is so completely being offered. He does not place her in a position of being subservient to him; instead, it is she who uses all the possible opportunities to adore him (fainting in order for him to catch her, sliding swooningly around his body, falling gracefully to the ground in front of him in a melting fashion to caress and kiss him). Hence, it is only on the surface that their movements appear romantic because in reality their movements suggest a view of gender relations in heterosexuality that are unequal. The man is protector and the object of veneration, and the woman lovingly submits to his superiority.

However, the Detective's full-length dance with the Brunette is wholly opposite. Set in an underworld jazz nightclub populated by gangsters and their molls, here it is animality, danger, and sex that reign. Yet rather than the cover of a falsely equal harmony, what characterizes their movements is challenge and the mutual respect that is created from seeing that both men and women possess different qualities and strengths. In the beginning, she struts her stuff (her fiery physique), then he follows (his gun). As with the other dance, gender difference is maintained. But in this

case it is celebrated in a complementary way. This point of gender difference, consequently, determines or structures the distribution of power between the man and woman in dance. In the first dance, the Blonde cedes her power (except to manipulate him, of course); in the second one, deferrals of power also occur-- but it is done in a reciprocated manner. This dance shows the Brunette acknowledging the power of the Male (displayed by her literally throwing herself on him after which he drags her along), while he then recognizes the dominion of the Female (like the portion where he travels backwards hunched down before her as she flashes her arms up in a threatening gesture that conveys the impression "Fear Me" and "Behold My Power"). That their dancing puts across a separate, but equal arrangement of power is evinced in the many instances where side by side and mirroring occur.

As with the already excessive figures of the Blonde and Brunette, "The Girl Hunt" constructs the competing types of heterosexuality personified by them in similarly extreme ways. Given that popular entertainment triumphs over elite art in the film, it is thus not strange that the jazz-identified Brunette should win out over the ballet-identified Blonde. What is highly unconventional, though, is that such a sex-identified

woman should walk away with the man at the end. Yet is this not in line with the eros-positive point of view expressed in *An American in Paris*, and most particularly, *The Pirate*?

Despite the excessive and extreme features mentioned above, a remarkable balance is nonetheless achieved in the number and it is not only conveyed in the dance between the Brunette and the Detective. (The model of heterosexual love and identity seen between them is gender difference that goes beyond *Meet Me in St. Louis*, but not so far that boundaries collapse as in *The Pirate*.) It is viewed in the camera style. If *The Band Wagon* opens with a flamboyance of camera, but becomes low-key later on, what is seen in this number is a balance between the two extremes.

Indeed out of all the numbers from the new "Band Wagon" this is the only one where whole parts of it could not realistically come from a stage setting although other parts could. Like Astaire's career, it is as if the film is saying that there must be a levelling out before construction can happen. (Perhaps it is not for nothing that the number just before "The Girl Hunt" is "Triplets" where performers Tony, Lily, and "Jeff" are made to seem the same height to play a trio of fighting infants.) From the balance of this construction the

following is created: what was once old (Astaire) is now new; what is popular entertainment (Spillane and noir) is elevated now by a look and style more associated with elite art; and what is a form of male-female relationship based on difference is now also based on full equality and respect.

* * * * *

In conclusion, I have tried to show that it is possible to analyse the ways in which the loaded silences of a social majority such as heterosexuality are constructed.

Examining the musical, the genre in which the rhetoric of boy-meets-girl is most insistent, allowed me to investigate the substance and design of heterosexuality identity as expressed in romance. In analysing the films of two of the greatest auteurs of the Hollywood musical, Fred Astaire and Vincente Minnelli, I soon discovered it is not a monolithic construction. Instead there are at least three models in which men and women relate to one another, although one of them (the complementary version) is most standard. Looking at such aspects as the manner in which each gender moves in the world and are positioned in the narrative, and above all, their precise behaviour in the numbers, was the principal means of ascertaining which of the models were suggested in the films.

Although I make no claims for the way in which Astaire and Minnelli show heterosexuality after their final joint effort together (*The Band Wagon*), I trace the manner how each artist depicts boy-meets-girl love in their key musicals until that film. In so doing, I analyse the extraordinary manner Astaire is constructed and the content and style of his screen persona-- as well as the fascinating process whereby his archetypal image was later undermined. In both cases I discussed how these processes were crucially linked to the heterosexuality of his characters. Likewise, I studied Minnelli and saw that despite constructing different models of heterosexuality life and identity, that each was represented in ways that are remarkably rich. A constant theme of his films-- the relationship between romance and art (love leading to artistic possibilities-- was also analysed.

Finally, in looking at the *The Band Wagon* I discussed the ways in which the best aspects of both artists (especially in the representation of heterosexuality) are evident. Indeed, its last number ("The Girl Hunt") acts as an apotheosis of the mutual transformations between them. Thus my investigation of heterosexuality in the screen musicals of Astaire and Minnelli not only disclosed different models, but a positive evolution

over time. I hope this thesis has suggested that a majority representation such as heterosexuality can not only be analysed, but in the process of denaturalizing it allows one to be critical and appreciative of it in the appropriate measure.

ENDNOTES

137. Perkins, p. 119. (*Italics his.*)
138. Feuer, "The Self-Reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment" in Genre: The Musical ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 166.
139. Robert Osborne, Academy Awards Illustrated: A Complete History of Hollywood's Academy Awards in Words and Picture (La Habra, CA: ESE California, 1977), p. 169.
140. Mueller, pp. 350-51.
141. Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 14.
142. Altman, p. 250.
143. Sarris, p. 101.
144. Perhaps the earliest booster who called for a reconsideration of the Forties MGM musicals (*Yolanda and the Thief* in particular) was Ed Lowry (*Cinema Texas Program Notes: Yolanda and the Thief*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1977), followed by Altman 10 years later in his American Film Musical (pp. 186-88). Later these films began to attract the attention of queer scholarship in material ranging from a closing "Gay Readings" section to Feuer's second edition of The Hollywood Musical (pp. 139-43) to Matthew Tinkcom's essay on the Freed unit ("Working Like a Homosexual: Camp Visual Codes and the Labor of Gay Subjects in the MGM Freed Unit," in *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Winter 1996).
145. Tinkcom, p. 38.
146. Peter Hogue, "The Band Wagon," *Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema*, Winter 1974, p. 33
147. Elsaesser, pp. 220-21.
148. Feuer, op. cit., p. 166.
149. Harvey, Directed By Vincente Minnelli, p. 121.
150. Ibid., Fred Astaire, p. 130.
151. Richard Corliss, Talking Pictures: Screenwriters

in the American Cinema 1927-1973 (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1974), p. 200.

152. Harvey, Fred Astaire, pp. 129-30.

153. Cavell, The World Viewed, pp. 25-29. For an application of Cavell's thought, see William Rothman, Documentary Film Classics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-20, where he compares and contrasts Nanook as "real" person and performer in *Nanook of the North* (1922, Robert Flaherty) with Lillian Gish as star and title character in *True Heart Susie* (1919, Griffith).

154. Feuer, "The Self-Reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," p. 167.

155. Jerome Delamater, Dance in the Hollywood Musical (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1981), p. 226.

156. Feuer, The Hollywood Musical, pp. 1-65.

157. Hogue, p. 34.

158. Altman, p. 260.

159. Ibid. pp. 258-60.

160. Mast, p. 273.

161. Harvey, Directed By Minnelli, p. 114.

162. Feuer, "The Self-Reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," p. 167.

163. Mueller, p. 356.

164. Mast, p. 271.

165. Barry Salt, Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis (London: Starword, 1983), p. 29.

166. Harvey, Directed By Minnelli, p. 120.

167. Mueller, p. 360.

168. Harvey, Directed By Minnelli, p. 123.

169. Quote taken from Naremore, p. 3.

170. Mueller, p. 357.

171. Dyer, "'I Seem to Find the Happiness I Seek: Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical," p. 59.

172. Ibid.

173. Harvey, Directed By Minnelli, p. 122. In a conversation I had with Cyd Charisse in August 1994, she told me that "Dancing in the Dark" was not only the favourite of all her numbers (tied with *Silk Stockings*'s "The Red Blues") but that Gene Kelly felt it was the best Hollywood dance number.

174. Croce, p. 108.

175. Mueller, p. 111.

176. This would be a consistent application of Cavell which I think is only fair. See also: Richard A. Isay, Being Homosexual: Gay Men and Their Development (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 88-90.

177. Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1974), pp. 35-59.

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FILMS:

The Band Wagon Director: Vincente Minnelli. Producer: MGM (Arthur Freed), USA, 1953. Main cast: Fred Astaire (Tony Hunter), Cyd Charisse (Gaby Gerard), Jack Buchanan (Jeffrey Cordova), Oscar Levant (Lester Marton), Lily Marton (Nanette Fabary), James Mitchell (Paul Byrd), Shoeshine man (LeRoy Daniels). Story and Screenplay: Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Songs: Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz. Choreography: Michael Kidd. Numbers: "By Myself," "A Shine on Your Shoes," "That's Entertainment," "Dancing in the Dark," "I Love Louisa," "New Sun in the Sky," "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plans," "Louisiana Hayride," "Triplets," "The Girl Hunt Ballet: A Murder Mystery in Jazz." Running time: 112 min. Colour.

Carefree Director: Mark Sandrich. Producer: RKO-Radio Pictures (Pandro S. Berman), USA, 1938. Main cast: Ginger Rogers (Amanda Cooper), Fred Astaire (Dr. Tony Flagg), Ralph Bellamy (Stephen Arden), Luella Gear (Aunt Cora), Jack Carson (Connors), Clarence Kolb (Judge Joe Travers). Screenplay: Allan Scott and Ernest Pagano (story and adaptation by Dudley Nichols and Hagar Wilde, based on an original idea by Marian Ainslee and Guy Endore) Songs: Irving Berlin. Choreography: Fred Astaire and Hermes Pan. Numbers: "Since They Turned 'Loch Lomond' into Swing," "I Used to be Color Blind," "The Yam," "Change Partners." Running time: 83 min. Black and white.

Meet Me in St. Louis Director: Vincente Minnelli, Producer: MGM (Arthur Freed), USA, 1944. Main cast: Judy Garland (Esther Smith), Margaret O'Brien (Tootie Smith), Mary Astor (Anna Smith), Lucille Bremer (Rose Smith), Tom Drake (John Truett), Leon Ames (Alonzo Smith), Marjorie Main (Katie), Harry Davenport (Grandpa), Joan Carroll (Agnes Smith), June Lockhart (Lucille Ballard), Henry H. Daniels, Jr. (Lon Smith, Jr.), Chill Wills (Mr. Neeley), Robert Sally (Warren Sheffield). Screenplay: Irving Brecher and Fred F. Finklehoffe (based on stories published in *The New Yorker* by Sally Benson). Cinematography: George Folsey. Songs: Hugh Martin and Ralph Blaine, Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown, and traditional standards. Numbers: "Meet Me in St. Louis," "The Boy Next Door," "Skip to My Lou," "Under the Bamboo Tree," "The Trolley Song," "You and I," "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." Running time: 113 min. Colour.

The Pirate Director: Vincente Minnelli. Producer: MGM (Arthur Freed), USA, 1948. Main cast: Judy Garland (Manuela), Gene Kelly (Serafin), Walter Slezak (Don Pedro), Gladys Cooper (Aunt Inez), George Zucco (the Viceroy), Lester Allen (Capucho), the Nicholas Brothers. Screenplay: Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich (based on the play by S.N. Behrman). Songs: Cole Porter. Choreography: Robert Alton and Gene Kelly. Numbers: "Niña," "Mack the Black," "Love of My Life," "You Can Do No Wrong," "Be a Clown." Running time: 102 min. Colour.

The Sky's the Limit Director: Edward H. Griffith. Producer: RKO Radio Pictures (David Hampstead), USA, 1943. Main cast: Fred Astaire (Fred Atwill), Joan Leslie (Joan Manyon), Robert Benchley (Phil Harriman), Robert Ryan (Reginald Fenton). Screenplay: Frank Fenton and Lynn Root (based on the story "A Handful of Heaven," derived from the story "On Special Service" by William T. Ryder). Songs: Johnny Mercer and Richard Arlen. Choreography: Fred Astaire. Numbers: "My Shining Hour," "A Lot in Common with You," "Snake Dance," "My Shining Hour" (dance), "One for My Baby." Running time: 89 min. Black and white.

Top Hat Director: Mark Sandrich. Producer: RKO-Radio Pictures (Pandro S. Berman), USA, 1935. Main cast: Fred Astaire (Jerry Travers), Ginger Rogers (Dale Tremont), Edward Everett Horton (Horace Hardwick), Helen Broderick (Madge Hardwick), Eric Blore (Bates), Erik Rhodes (Alberto Beddini). Screenplay: Dwight Taylor and Allan Scott (based on an original idea by Dwight Taylor). Songs: Irving Berlin. Art Director: Van Nest Polgase and Carroll Clark. Choreography: Fred Astaire and Hermes Pan. Numbers: "No Strings," "Isn't it a Lovely Day (to be Caught in the Rain)?," "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," "Cheek to Cheek," "The Piccolino." Running time: 101 min. Black and white.

TELEVISION:

The Fred Astaire Songbook Director: David Heeley, Producer: PBS-TV (Joan Kramer and David Heeley), USA, 1991. Host and Narrator: Audrey Hepburn. Screenplay: John L. Miller. Commentators: Adele Astaire, Peter Duchin, Will Friedwald, Burton Lane, June Levant, Melissa Manchester, Liza Minnelli, Hermes Pan, Richard Schickel. Running time: 90 min. Colour/black and white.